URBAN AFRICAN AMERICAN CHARTER SCHOOL PRINCIPALS: CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND TEACHER FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

A Dissertation

by

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Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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May 2018

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study involves eight African American charter school principals. I chose a qualitative research framework to provide these eight participants with the opportunity to use their voices and express their backgrounds, life experiences and leadership practices about their cultural competence identities and the impact of this on teacher faculty development, primarily professional development. A dearth of literature exists regarding the lived experiences of African American charter school principals, their cultural competence identities and impact on teacher faculty development. Therefore, the purpose of the study expands on this limited research base. The undergirding research questions of this study include: (a) how do African American charter school principals describe their cultural competence identities, (b) how do African American charter school principals describe exercises of professional development for cultural proficiency, and (c) how do African American charter school principals interpret their acts of cultural competence related to teacher faculty development.

A thematic analysis yielded the following themes related to the experiences of eight African American charter school principals, their cultural competence identities and impact on teacher faculty development: (a) Mirrors Reflect Black Gems, (b) Breaking Bread but Not Breaking Shackles, and (c) Shattering Oppression. Findings from this research provided the following evidence: (a) school leaders' cultural competence identities reflect each of their students as Black Gems, consistently

educating and preparing their students for racial adversity, (b) professional development sessions were seen as a means to "break bread" instead of producing tangible results regarding cultural competence, and (c) school leaders shattered oppression by choosing to either let go or nurture a teacher struggling with cultural competence. The main conclusion drawn from this research suggests the development of a formal framework by which cultural competence training follows and embeds within daily practice. The last chapter provided implications and recommendations for future research, policy and practice.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to educators who face adversity as they strive toward their goals and the provision of culturally competent pedagogy and leadership. Stay rooted and true to who you are; it is imperative to teach children that the power of knowledge leads to the breakage of chains.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chairs, Dr. Norvella Carter and Dr. Patrick Slattery and committee members, Dr. Gwendolyn Webb-Hasan, and Dr. Monica Neshyba, for your guidance, support, advice, and wisdom throughout the course of this program and research.

Additionally, I want to express my most humble gratitude to my participants, who were willing to be part of this study. Your contributions have inspired me to continue delving into why we educate and why cross-cultural teaching is so important; knowing yourself, is knowing your students. Thank you for being great role models as educational leaders.

Special thanks to my parents, Philip and Roz Butterfield, who instilled in me a love of learning, a love of education and pushed me to reach my highest potential. I would not be where I am and would not have finished this program without their encouragement and support. For that I am forever indebted to the both of you. I also want to thank my sister, Charlene and nephew Davis, whose FaceTime calls kept me going and gave me a laugh just when I needed it. Thanks to my aunts, uncles, cousins and extended family who were always rooting for me from afar. Many thanks to my cousin, Marlene Archer, whose house I spent many a night working on my application for Texas A&M University. Without her help, this dream would not have happened. I also want to thank Dr. Tommie L. Robinson, Jr., my professor, mentor, and friend from Howard University. He saw strengths in me that I could not see in myself and

encouraged me to pursue doctoral studies. Thank you for your unwavering support, incessant laughter and prayers; I HAVE THE UNION CARD! I must also thank my special friend, Helen Dowtin, who was my "editor," ear to listen when I laughed, cried, vented and confidant throughout this journey; our friendship of 15 years continues to grow and I can't wait to see what the future holds. To my dearest Pete, thank you for friendship; stay focused and keep your horse blinders on as you navigate your PhD program. I would also like to thank all of my other friends for their support and lending an ear, they understood my journey and stood for me when at times, I felt like I could not.

To those who have passed, but continue to watch over me. While their presence is no longer physical on this earth, their spirit lives on and I pray that when we meet again, when we are all in heaven, we will sing and shout the victory. By the grace of God, I made it through. I must give praise to God for His gift; guiding my hands and mind to write this piece, leading me through this journey and fulfilling the plan He bestowed upon my life. I ask that He continue to grant me the strength to carry out His will.

CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

Contributors

All work for the dissertation was completed by the student, under the advisement of Dr. Norvella Carter and Dr. George Patrick Slattery, Jr. of the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Culture.

Funding Sources

There are no outside funding contributions to acknowledge related to the research and compilation of this document.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Page

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

LIST OF TABLES

Page

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"A new form of slavery" describes many schools in urban, impoverished areas in the United States (Deneen & Catanese, 2011). This arises from a majority of African American and Latino students trapped in these schools without the learning opportunities needed to lead productive lives. Only equipped to perform society's least desirable work at minimal wages, these students face lives of dependence that can readily turn to bitterness and despair. As a result, the reality exists for the majority of these students mirror the reality faced by slaves from previous generations. It doesn't seem an exaggeration to term this reality an enslavement of the majority of children in our impoverished major cities (Deneen & Catanese, 2011). Ultimately, these schools fail our country by not providing the educated citizenry who can maintain the nation's social, political, and economic health. To address some of these issues, charter schools were initially introduced as a model for public schools to adapt innovative and effective teaching strategies as well as remedy the problems in existing urban institutions. Charter schools were meant to offer Black students a chance to excel in communities where the traditional public schools have been failing for many decades.

Charter schools were claimed to "revolutionize American education by their freedom to innovate and produce dramatically better results" (Ravitch, 2013, p. 156). In the eyes of progressive educators, the partnership of public and charter schools works to educate and best serve students and communities (Weil, 2009). Proponents of charter schools see the partnership between these schools as a means to:

> Explore new ways to educate these students. They should develop strategies and curricula to benefit all schools, regularly sharing what they have learned. If charter schools sought to enroll the neediest students, they would become an integral part of public education and a valued partner of public schools. (Ravitch, 2013, p. 251)

While the partnership between public and charter schools might help to restore the original intent of the charter school movement, results of charter schools' overall success remains mixed. Continued speculation surrounds whether charter schools provide a viable solution or simply a temporary fix to larger systemic issues typically addressed at the micro-level. In addition, speculation remains as to whether the outcomes of charter schools rest on the cultural competence of its leaders.

When charter schools began in the early 1990s, they offered many potential solutions to existing systemic issues within the American education system (Weil, 2009). As the decade came to a close, more than 1,100 charter schools existed across the nation and enrolled more than 250,000 students (Weil, 2009). As of the 2015-2016 school year, more than 6,800 public charter schools exist in 42 states and the District of Columbia and enroll 3 million students, a six-fold increase in enrollment over the past 15 years (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2016). Charter school proponents claimed these schools provided a way to stimulate new and innovative educational opportunities and present parents and communities with alternatives to traditional public

schooling through "choice." Charter schools are typically located in urban areas serving many African American and Hispanic student populations. With 400 new charter schools opening their doors each year, a strong supply of leaders is crucial to the sustainability of charter schools (NCES, 2016).

Cultural competence development, with a deep emphasis on "the how," should be a fundamental aspect of school principals' preparation and practice. In some cases, school leaders lack awareness of cultural influences in school settings or consciously choose to maintain a status quo of inequitable practices. Ethnic and/or racial identity, buttressed by a defining and supporting cultural embeddedness supports many students' sense of personal and group integrity as well as worth (Jenkins, 1994). Perhaps most noticeably, many school leaders serve an increasingly socioeconomically and culturally diverse student population (Owings & Kaplan, 2003). Recent Census Bureau data project that by 2042 people of color in the United States will outnumber their White counterparts, 8 years earlier than predicted 4 years ago. By 2023, children of color under 18 represent the majority of U.S. citizens (Roberts, 2008). Unfortunately, for many students of color or from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, schools continue a legacy of deficit thinking and marginalization (Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005; Valencia & Solorzano, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999). Just as a large base of scholarship contends that teachers should understand their students' cultural differences (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner, 2005), educational leadership scholars have called for preparation programs to prepare future and current school leaders to lead for equity, diversity, and social justice

(Brown, 2004; Dantley & Tillman, 2006). However, preparation programs do not entirely provide educational leaders with ways to understand the process of becoming culturally competent, particularly how African Americans must first embrace their racial identity before becoming culturally proficient leaders.

Research confirms that important aspects of educational leadership involve diversity self-awareness and self-reflection; facilitation of faculty discussions on privilege, inequities, racism, and raised expectations for all students; and advocating for and understanding the backgrounds of traditionally marginalized students (Dantley & Tillman, 2006). LaFramboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993) suggest that a:

> Culturally competent individual "possesses a strong personal identity, has knowledge of the beliefs and values of the culture, displays sensitivity to the affective processes of the culture, communicates clearly in the language of the cultural group, performs socially sanctioned behavior, maintains active social relations within the cultural group and negotiates the institutional structures of that culture." (p. 3)

Social skills and personality development play a role in the continuum of cultural competency (Lum, 1999). Lum (1999) also suggests that the concept of cultural competence addresses individuals': (a) sense of self-sufficiency and ego strength; (b) cultural identity related to culture of origin and cultural context; (c) knowledge, appreciation, and internalization of basic beliefs of a culture; (d) positive attitudes about

a cultural group; (e) bicultural efficacy, or ability to live effectively within two groups without compromising one's sense of cultural identity; (f) ability to communicate, verbally and nonverbally, ideas and feelings to members of one's own or another culture; (g) possession of a role repertoire, or range of culturally appropriate behaviors or roles; and (h) belonging to stable social networks in both cultures. (p. 3)

Despite the growing movement of transformative leadership and teaching, scholarship and research in educational leadership have largely left developmental perspectives on culturally competent identities unexplored. This literature highlights the need to conduct research about how the developmental complexity (or simplicity) of cultural competence influences one's ability to understand and engage in intercultural relationships (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007; Bennett, 2004; Bennett & Bennett, 2004). "We assume that principals have greater capacity for cultural competence (that will vary according to context) as they develop more complex levels of intercultural sensitivity" (Hernandez & Kose, 2012, p. 514). We must therefore assume that principals possess an understanding that identity reflects culture from which the identity emerges, causing people of different cultures to inhabit different worlds (Jenkins, 1994). Although closer to understanding exemplary principal leadership in diverse schools, research has not conceptualized how principals become culturally competent, particularly from the perspective of Black identity.

Ladson-Billings (2006) shared the following interaction with a perspective teacher: "Everybody keeps telling us about multicultural education, but nobody is telling

us how to do it!" (p. 30). Perplexing to many of those in her audience, Ladson-Billings (2006) lamented, "Even if we could tell you how to do it, I would not want us to tell you how to do it" (p. 39). Two important points emerged from Ladson-Billings' (2006) response to the prospective teacher who questioned how to "do" multicultural education and culturally relevant teaching. First, teachers, including urban, provide educational experiences to a range of students bringing an enormous range of diversity into the learning environment. Teachers and leaders must remain mindful of their students and the range of needs brought into classrooms. Second, the social context shaping urban students' experiences appears vast and integral in a complex way thus dictating what decisions are made; how decisions are made; and why urban students' needs vary from year to year. From Ladson-Billings' (2006) response that no one tells us how to "do democracy" (p. 39); we just do it, the notion of how African American charter school leaders develop their cultural competence identities and how these identities impact teacher faculty development lends itself to an unexplored research area.

"Leadership, then is not mobilizing others to solve problems we already know how to solve, but to help them confront problems that have never yet been successfully addressed" (Heifetz, 1994, p. 15). This purposeful paradigmatic shift is an educational imperative for dealing with the increasing diversity of urban K-12 schools. When urban leadership fails to take diversity seriously, African American students in urban schools often become disfranchised by a conspiracy of mediocrity (Beachum & Obiaker, 2005; Sergiovanni, 1992). Despite the vast knowledge base of effective and culturally

responsive teaching practices, school leaders appear to either lack the background or exposure to professional growth opportunities, relevant practices, or culturally responsive leadership practices (Bustamante, Nelson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). The increasing diversity in schools requires new methods in educational leadership. These methods should allow leaders to exhibit culturally responsive organizational practices, behaviors, and abilities (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). If no clear definition or specific indicators exist regarding what cultural responsiveness looks like for leaders, a superficial or assumed set of standards that leaders follow may or may not distinguish them as culturally responsive leaders. However, as Ladson-Billings (2006) proclaims, that "we do it" and how racial self-identity is developed continues to loom over the heads of teachers and school leaders.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of Nigrescence and the transformative learning theory informed the approach and analysis of understanding how African American charter school principals develop their cultural competence identities and the ways in which this shapes teacher faculty development.

William Cross developed the theory of Nigrescence in 1971 and is considered to be the seminal Black racial identity development model (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). Nigrescence first referred to "an identity change process, a Negro-to-Black conversion experience; the same kind of process that could be seen in Black behavior during the Harlem Renaissance and the Garvey movement of the 1920s"

(Cross, 1991, p. 189). The theory was reconsidered in 1991 and was essentially seen as a re-socializing experience moving individuals from a non-Afrocentric identity to Afrocentric. Constantine, Richardson, Benjamin, and Wilson (1998) interpreted Nigrescence as the developmental process of becoming Black, an explanation of the Black identity and consciousness process for Black Americans. The process of Nigrescence occurs in five stages: (a) pre-encounter; (b) encounter; (c) immersion-emersion; (d) internalization; and (e) internalization-commitment. As a result of different experiences or life events, our racial identity will be constantly shaped and redefined, the process thus occurring in a circular manner.

Applying the theory of Nigrescence enabled me to explore the process by which African American charter school principals developed their racial identity and how they embrace their journey. Furthermore, this process explored in this theory could potentially unveil how cultural competence identities of charter school leaders can help to develop teachers in their respective school settings. If principals can assist teachers through this same process particularly through professional development, then there is an opportunity to develop a framework by which all charter school leaders can reflect and use as a guide.

The focus of teacher faculty development was also explored through the lens of the transformative learning theory. "Transformative learning theory first emerged in the 1970s with Mezirow's work about how adults make sense of their life experience" (Alfred, Cherrstrom, Robinson, & Friday, 2013, p. 133). According to Mezirow (2012):

Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (p. 76)

These frames of reference are used to "define our world and include the assumptions and expectations we use to filter and understand our experiences" (Alfred, Cherrstrom, Robinson, & Friday, 2013, p. 133). The premise of this theory is to allow for opportunities of learning to be transformative. Mezirow (2012) identified ten phases of transformative learning: (a) a disorienting dilemma; (b) self-examination of emotions; (c) assessment of assumptions; (d) reflection and recognition of shared discontent; (e) exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions; (f) planning action steps; (g) gathering information and resources to implement steps; (h) put action plan into effect; (i) build capacity in new roles and knowledge; and (j) integrate new perspective and knowledge into current work.

The transformative learning theory is significant because it is a solid model for the kind of professional development that is needed to support a collaborative school culture and educator reflection. This theory is also significant and applicable to this study in that teachers use culturally relevant frameworks and assumptions to guide their thinking. It is also particularly important when creating professional development

sessions for school staff surrounding cultural competence. The ten-phase process can therefore influence how an individual questions cultural norms related to learning experiences and generate new frameworks (Alfred, Cherrstrom, Robinson, & Friday, 2013) impacting their teaching skills and student academic performance. Charter school principals can provide professional development sessions that specifically target ways to impact their teacher's development and inform teachers of how to critically reflect on the knowledge given to become transformed teachers.

Personal Story

A good education combines the acquisition of broad knowledge and critical thinking with a support system that includes teachers and parents. It can be transformative and far-ranging effects for students and their communities at large. I have benefitted from such an education, though not without some resistance. It is in those moments, when I did not have the support of my teachers, that I began to understand that it is a necessary component of academic success. It has fueled my drive to work in the educational field and further my study in the area of Urban Education. My paternal grandmother, who herself lacked a college degree, worked as a maid for a wealthy family in Bermuda. Her hard work and high expectations inspired my father to excel in primary school, and her savings mentality despite not being wealthy herself allowed her to send my father to the US to pursue his undergraduate and graduate degrees. In the 50's and 60's, Bermuda society was segregated; Black children were not expected to succeed, nor were there opportunities for professional advancement, much

like here in the US. However, my grandmother's belief that one's dreams and potential are not limited by one's current circumstances gave my father the drive to obtain a good secondary education.

My parents, with a desire to improve life for themselves and others, made sure that my sister and I would also have access to a good education, building on the work begun by others before them. Though I did not grow up in a segregated setting, I experienced racism just the same, as an African-American student in a predominantly White town. At times, my teachers did not believe in my potential, choosing instead to think that I was limited by the color of my skin. As a nine-year old, I was told by a classmate to "get my black hands off of him". Instead of reprimanding the other student and supporting me, our teacher chastised me, saying, "If you're going to be that sensitive, then you should go back to where you came from." My parents knew that if this issue was not remedied, the quality of my education could be jeopardized. They wrote a letter to the school board, and I was ultimately moved to a new classroom. Though my education wasn't derailed, my confidence was shaken for a while, as I had to make new friends believing that the changes were caused by something I had done. Over time, I understood that I was not to blame for others' ignorance. I saw that without the support of both teachers and families, it is all too easy for students of color to be marginalized such that their education suffers.

Despite moving to a new classroom, I never felt fully at ease during my primary education. I was often asked on high school sports teams if I felt 'comfortable' since I

was the only African American girl on the team. Some teachers refused to write college recommendations, as they did not believe I would be admitted to certain schools (which I ultimately attended anyway). I credit my family's support and belief system with my success. During my primary education, despite the sometimes-chilly reception from teachers and classmates, I was expected to excel, and was inspired to dream beyond the confines of teachers' opinions. My family encouraged me to pursue both undergraduate and graduate degrees, live abroad, learn other languages, and immerse myself in other cultures, as the world is a big place, waiting to be discovered. From this background, I developed a love of learning and saw the value of sensitive teaching.

In my work as a former speech-language pathologist and tackling administrative duties at a charter school in the South Bronx, I witnessed firsthand the damage done by lack of a good education. Students faced challenges ranging from ineffective leadership, insufficient parental support, to unqualified teachers and inadequate educational policies. The end result is that by most measures, the student body was failing: most students read well below grade level, and there were constant discipline issues that disrupt the classroom experience. A student who can't read on grade level by 3rd grade is four times less likely to graduate from high school by age 19 than one who does read proficiently by that time (Sparks, 2011). My experience working as a teacher in the Bermuda public school system, with a predominantly Black student body, was similar. Whether in Bermuda or New York City, some school leaders, teachers, and parents alike had low expectations, which were reflected in students' weak academic results. I

worked with school leaders and teachers who were unfamiliar with the culture in which they taught and one would think that in a charter school setting, there would be more awareness. These experiences compelled me to dedicate my career and research to ensure that all children, particularly in charter schools, have the opportunity to achieve their highest potential and contribute to the world as global citizens.

My former principal in the South Bronx was also one of the reasons why I decided to study for my PhD. She opened a Montessori school for African American and Latino children in the South Bronx, NY. While the impetus for opening the school was noble, she held beliefs about African American and Latino students that reflected deficit thinking. For example, when students misbehaved, she instructed teachers to not call home because she presumed that all Black parents beat their children and this was not a form of discipline that which she agreed. When parents were told of their child's behavior during conferences, they were disturbed that the teacher and principal never informed them of their child's disruptive behavior. One parent not only expressed her disappointment and outrage, but also their willingness to work with the teacher and address the poor behavior. The principal's beliefs aligned with a systemic framework of deeply rooted sedimented perceptors (Slattery, 2013, p.311). It is for this very reason that I find myself seeking to learn how principals form their cultural competence identity and how this impacts teachers within their respective charter school educational settings. The dearth of research regarding African American school leaders in charter settings lends itself to a wealth of knowledge that can significantly impact the educational field

given the steady rate of charter school growth. Findings from this study have the potential to impact future school leaders in the same regard as well as shape future studies.

Statement of Problem

Motivations for becoming a principal vary widely and are multifaceted. For example, my former principal, who was from a South American country, referenced reasons as to why they pursued an administrator position. She wanted to offer Montessori school to children who otherwise would not have had the opportunity to go in the South Bronx, NY. She also felt that since she was from Venezuela and spoke Spanish that her ability to do so was in her favor to open and lead this kind of school. Not only was her reasoning from a savior perspective, offering a kind of schooling to the underserved, but also the sheer language capability did not mean that one was familiar with the culture in which she taught. It also did not signify a true process of whether or not she developed a sense of cultural competence and if she did, there was not a clear sense of the process in which this cultural competence developed and how this transcended amongst her staff and students. There was also no indication of how this impacted her racial self-identity and shaped her every day decisions and how she navigated in this position as herself and as a school leader.

For more than a decade, scholars in the field of educational leadership have emphasized that effective school leadership is contingent upon a thorough understanding of school culture (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan, 1991; Leithwood & Janzti, 1990,

2000; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Peterson & Deal, 2002; Sashkin & Walberg, 1993; Sergiovanni, 2001). Decades of research also guide the culturally responsive teacher and leader, inclusive of characteristics and training; however there is a limited amount of information about how culturally competent identity is formed amongst African American charter school principals and how their identity formation impacts teacher faculty development.

Purpose of the Study

Decades of research guides the culturally responsive teacher and leader, inclusive of characteristics and training; however, there is a limited amount of information about how culturally competent identity is formed amongst charter school principals. The purpose of this study was to examine and interpret the cultural competence identities of African American charter school principals.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that it isolates the culturally competent identity development of African American charter school principals in their respective school environments. If the development process is understood, these principals have the ability to provide a framework for use by other African American charter school leaders. This study should provide insights for higher education administrators and educators, superintendents, teachers, parents, community leaders, and educational stakeholders.

Research Questions

Based on this limited amount of information, I was led to study the following questions:

1. How do African American charter school principals describe their cultural competence identities?
2. How do African American charter school principals describe exercises of professional development for cultural proficiency?
3. How do African American charter school principals interpret their acts of cultural competence related to teacher faculty development?

Definition of Terms

Cultural Competence. Aligning your personal values and behaviors and the school's policies and practices in a manner that is inclusive of cultures that are new or different from yours and the school's and enables healthy and productive interactions (Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 2009, p. 7)

Charter School. Charter schools are public school under contract. These contracts, or charters, are granted from a public agency to a group of parents, teachers, school administrators, nonprofit agencies (like but not limited to a school board), for-profit management groups, organizations, or businesses that wish to create an alternative to existing public schools. Charter schools receive public money and legally cannot discriminate or exclude students. They are publicly accountable and are not private or alternative schools. As legal entities, they exist under a legal public contract, or charter,

with the local school district or state body that is empowered to approve the charter. (Weil, 2009, pp. 5-6)

Identity. Identity is shaped around which social group/s an individual identifies with, but the research is rooted in African American identity

Nigrescence. An identity change process; a Negro-to-Black conversion reminiscent of Black behavior during the Harlem Renaissance (Cross, 1991). The term can also be defined as the developmental process by which a person "becomes Black" where Black is defined in terms of one's manner of thinking about and evaluating oneself and one's reference groups rather than in terms of skin color per se (Helms, 1990, p.17).

Traditional Public Schools. A regular school has an assigned principal, receives public funding as its primary support, provides free public elementary and/or secondary schooling, and is operated by a local education agency or a contracted education program (Tourkin, Thomas, Swaim, Cox, Parmer, Jackson, Cole, & Zhang, 2010).

Summary

This introductory chapter presented an overview of the study through description of the background, personal story and personal relevance of the study, purpose, and significance. Chapter two constructed the theoretical framework of the study through a review of literature related to the research questions. Chapter three described the research design employed to conduct the study, with particular attention to methodology and technique applied to data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

One must understand Nigrescence Theory to make meaning of the relationship between the identity of African American charter school principals, their conceptualization of cultural competence, and their impact on teacher faculty development. Considered to be the seminal Black racial identity development model, Nigrescence Theory was developed in 1971 by William Cross and considered to be the seminal Black racial identity development model (Vandiver, Cross, Worrell & Fhagen-Smith, 2002). Cross (1991) re-considered his theory as a re-socializing experience, one that transformed a preexisting identity (e.g., non-Afrocentric identity), to one that is Afrocentric. The identity of African American charter school leadership is understudied, particularly in regards to how cultural competence forms and the subsequent impact on teacher faculty development. This literature review sought to establish a landscape that illustrates the need for more scholarship on the phenomenon of African American charter school principals' cultural competence identities and how their identities impact teacher faculty development.

Conceptual Framework

Charter Schools

A former professor of school administration, Ray Budde initially brought attention to charter schools in the late 1980s. In 1988, Albert Shanker, an Education Reformer and former president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), advanced the idea a new kind of public school-"charter schools"- which would allow

teachers to experiment with innovate approaches to educating students (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). Although thought of as an original proponent of charter schools, Shanker never intended that these schools would be non-union or that they would compete with public schools. He thought that the school would be formed by teachers to create a "school within a school" and eventually became autonomous. The purpose for these schools would center on enrollment of students exhibiting boredom or disengagement in mainstream public schools (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). He thought that teachers in charter schools would belong to the union and collaborate—not compete—with public schools (Ravitch, 2013).

The charter school movement represents one of the most symbolic and contentious developments in the history of United States public education (Weil, 2009). Charter schools, defined as public schools under contract, did not exist until they were passed by charter school legislation in 1991 by Minnesota charter school legislation (Weil, 2009). "The states involved in the charter school movement allowed the public to begin the charter school experiment, while simultaneously freeing many charter schools from state laws and standard school district policies and regulations" (Weil, 2009, p. 1). The idea behind charter schools centered on the principle that these schools provided parents and communities with progressive educational choices in comparison to traditional public schools (Weil, 2009).

According to Weil (2009), by definition:

> Charter schools are public schools under contract—called a charter. These contracts, or charters, are granted from a public agency to a group of parents,

> teachers, school administrators, nonprofit agencies (like but not limited to a school board), for-profit management groups, organizations, or businesses that wish to create an alternative to existing public schools. Charter schools receive public money and legally cannot discriminate or exclude students. A very important distinction to understand is that they are publicly accountable; thus, they are not private or alternative schools. They are legal entities that exist under a legal public contract, or charter, with the local school district or state body that is empowered to approve the charter. (pp. 5-6)

Over time however, charter schools morphed into a very different animal as conservatives, allied with some social-justice minded liberals, began to promote charters as part of an open market place from which families could choose schools (Khalenberg & Potter, 2014). Others viewed charter schools as an opportunity to empower educational leadership and circumvent teacher unions. Only about 12 percent of the nation's charter schools afford union representation for teachers (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). These schools are publicly funded, but independently managed (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). They are accountable for improving students' achievement as specified in a three- to five-year contract between themselves and the organization that charter or authorize them. In exchange for this explicit accountability, they are waived from most states and local rules, regulations and contracts regarding school operation (Nathan, 1999).

As of the 2013-2014 school year, an estimated 6,500 charter schools existed in the United States with about 2.5 million students in attendance. These schools, therefore, account for the education of more than 5% of all public school students in the United States (NCES, 2016). Nationwide, charter schools typically enroll more African American students living below the federal poverty line than traditional public schools and a smaller number of English language learners and special education students, but this can vary between districts and schools (CREDO, 2013). In addition, at least 75% of students in 33% of charter schools are eligible for free and reduced lunch whereas at least 75% of students in 19.7% of traditional public schools fall in the same category (NCES, 2014). According to the results from the 2011-2012 Schools and Staffing Survey, African Americans comprised 18.3% of charter school principal leadership in comparison to 65% White principals (Bitterman, Goldring, Gray, 2013). Recent research conducted by the U.S. Department of Education examined the percentages of White, African American, and Hispanic students in traditional public and charter schools. From figure 1, a comparison between students race and ethnicity percentages across school types becomes evident. For example, White students, although the majority of all students, are more likely to attend traditional public schools than their African American and Hispanic counterparts. In addition, both African American and Hispanic students attend charter schools at similar rates.

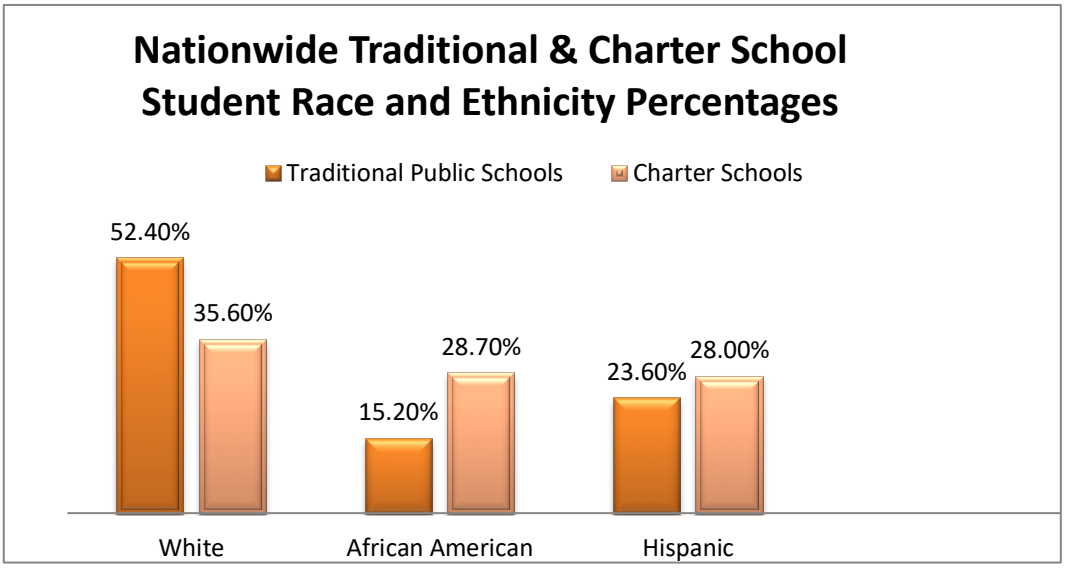


Figure 1. Illustration of races and ethnicities in charter schools. Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2014.

Benefits of Charter School

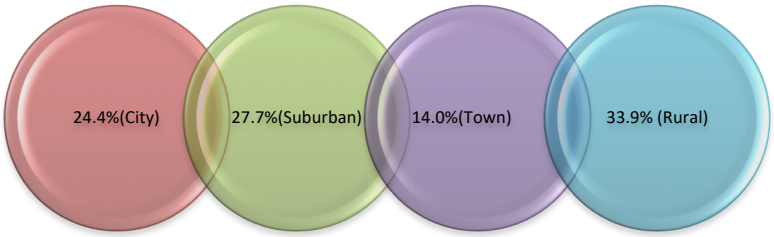
Proponents of charter schools argue these schools allow for increased capacity to empower parents into becoming more directly involved in their children's education. While this may or may not be true of charter schools, research suggests that both traditional public and charter schools with high levels of parent involvement report higher levels of student achievement and fewer classroom problems (Rose, 1999). Also, some proponents claim charter schools purposefully integrate low-, middle- and high-income parents to create opportunities for purposeful interaction amongst the student population (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). A commitment to their schools in such a manner, prioritizes student learning, parent accountability as well as a sense of

responsibility amongst all involved parties (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). To hold all stakeholders accountable, some charter schools create volunteer opportunities for parents and caregivers that are convenient for work schedules. Proponents also believe charter school administrators' appeals to local and state governments for funding holds these schools more accountable (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). As a result, proponents contend that charter schools positively influence student and family populations to increase accountability and a sense of responsibility across all stakeholders to transform communities and neighborhoods.

Proponents of charter schools also believe their educational objectives redefine the academic experiences of students (Weil, 2009). The original intent of charter schools centered on these educational objectives to serve as a teaching model for the traditional public school setting. While charter schools enroll more African American students and are located in cities, "charter school advocates often say that whatever the level of segregation found in charter schools, it is defensible on two grounds" (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014, p. 54). A review of data from the U.S. Department of Education indicate a difference in the distribution of traditional public and charter schools across locations (see figure 2). For example, traditional public schools are just as likely to be found in a city as they are in suburban, town, or rural locations. In contrast, charter schools are much more likely to be found in cities than suburban, town, or rural locations. Advocates believe that high academic achievement is more important than racial or economic integration (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). Laws enforced

historical segregation, whereas parents, particularly, parents of color, place their children in charter school by choice (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014).

A



B

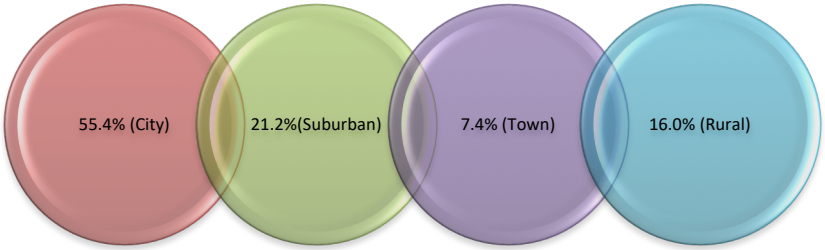


Figure 2. Illustration of traditional public (A) and charter school (B) locations. Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education for Statistics, Common Core of Data, "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 1999-2000 through 2011-12.

Challenges of Charter Schools

Despite strict charter school regulations, there are many reasons that critics openly claim charter schools as a disservice to students. It is believed that there is a diversion of public funds from traditional public schools to charter schools. There is also the argument that there is not adequate public oversight of charter schools and charter school accountability (Rose, 1999; Vergari, 1999). Charter school opponents also argue that they operate under favorable conditions that public schools do not enjoy including exemption from state and local regulations, low student-teacher ratios, high levels of parental involvement, and the ability to limit or cap enrollment (Brown, 1997; Vergari, 1999). There are also equity concerns and questions about whether a charter school offers a multicultural environment. Charter schools are typically located in urban areas and many serve predominantly African American and Hispanic student populations. It is argued that charter schools tend to further economic and educational disadvantages for students, particularly in urban school settings:

> As a nation, we have been counting on education to solve the problems of unemployment, joblessness, and poverty, but education did not cause these problems. An economic system that chases profits and casts people aside (especially people of color) is culpable" (Anyon, 2014, p. 5).

Opponents also contend that charter schools have not demonstrated having the capacity to improve the educational opportunities available to students in urban school setting and may well be little more than a political strategy for further isolating and

segregating such students within a failing public education system (Brown, 1997). "It is not surprising that students in charter schools are more economically and racially isolated than those in regular public schools given that many charter schools specifically target marginalized populations and low-income students, immigrants, religious and racial minorities-as part of their explicit mission" (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014, p. 51). Progressive educational policy analysts believe that charter schools racially, socioeconomically, and ethnically separate communities (Weil, 2009). Many also feel that charter schools may be the first step toward privatization of education and are concerned that charter schools will skim, or "cream off," predominantly white, privileged students from public schools and thus contribute to segregation of schools in the United States (Schwartz, 1996, p. 4). There is continued concern that charter schools have the propensity to cream off students and that this results in ethnically concentrated schools of choice.

Opponents of charter schools also believe that charter schools struggle with the ability to provide services for all students, such as students with disabilities and special education needs (Cobb & Glass, 1999). Some charter schools exclude students with special needs and disabilities all together. These exclusionary and selective admissions policies and practices might contribute to racial and class imbalances among schools and promote the return of "separate but equal" along racial lines the United States (Cobb & Glass, 1999). There is a fear that public policy measures such as charter school legislation will reinstate forced racial segregation in these schools (Weil, 2009). Others argue that the growing array of educational venture capitalists and for-profit corporations

that privately serve schools are driven not by educational concerns, but by the hopes of profitable business opportunities and the money to be made off the "educational market," which has increasingly been open to an eager group of entrepreneurs (Weil, 2009). Opponents would also argue that if a school is failing within the time frame that it is up for renewal and there is no accountability of the school's failing during this time, then the students' progress is hindered.

Leadership

Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004) explain leadership in terms of its social and situational contexts and the principal perform task, claiming that at its core is the "identification, acquisition, allocation, co-ordination, and use of the social, material, and cultural resources necessary to establish the conditions for the possibility of teaching and learning" (p. 11). Lord and Maher (1993) define leadership as a "process of being perceived as leader" (p. 11). Bolman and Deal (2008) believe that "leadership is not tangible, nor is it predicted upon authority." Researchers, however, across the globe highlight the usefulness of effectives skills that can translate to between both business and educational settings.

Over a five-year time span, Collins (2005) studied 1,435 Fortune 500 companies and determined what made a good company leap to being a great company. Historical data, which included each company's performance between 1965 and 1995, revealed, factors that transformed a "good" organization to a "great" organization; leadership being a determinant of a "great" organization. An effective leader according to Collins (2001) is one who has great professional will as well as great personal humility and they

seek success for the organization through building community vision. Leaders not only manage, but they galvanize growth and change in their company goals and employees. Collins (2001) not only describes an ideal leader as humble and professional, but a strong-willed individual who can navigate and develop an ever-changing organization with a distinct vision. Relating the meaning of humility and willfulness to that of school leaders, Collins (2001) interviewed Michael Brosnan, who is a writer and editor with the National Association of Independent Schools:

> They have high levels of humility and will. All their ambition and drive are channeled outward into a cause or a company or school. It truly is not about them. It's not about how they look to the public. Not about their career. Not about the power or the money. It's about the cause or the mission. And they have the utterly stoic will to do whatever it takes to succeed for the sake of that cause...Level 4 leaders can be very effective in getting people to do things, but deep down it is about them. Deep down, their ambition is about themselves. Level 5's are much more selfless. (Brosnan, 2015)

Bolman and Deal (2008) view leading and managing organizations through a different lens, specifically the Four Frame Theory of Leadership. This theory has a coherent and comprehensible set of ideas that enable leaders to understand clearly what decisions they need to make and the assumption as that effective leadership should apply multiple perspectives as known as a "frame" (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Leaders display behaviors in one of four frames including structural (rationality), human resource

(satisfaction), political (power and conflicts) or symbolic (culture) (Pourrajab & Ghani, 2016). Structural leaders focus on structure, strategy, environment, implementation, experimentation, and adaptations. Human resource leaders believe in people and communicate that belief; they are visible and accessible; they empower, increase participation, support, share information, and move decision-making down into the organization. In the political frame, leaders clarify what they want and what they can get; assess the distribution of power and interests, build linkages to other stakeholders, use persuasion first, but will use negotiation and coercion if necessary. "It is related to the realistic process of decision-making with consideration of limited resources" (Pourrajab & Ghani, 2016). The symbolic frame is considered a "conceptual umbrella," which is "combination of ideas from fields such as social and cultural anthropology, political science, and organizational theory" (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The organization is considered as a dynamic, non-linear entity that depends on symbolism to make sense of an irrational and ambiguous operational environment and is typically associated with human experience and stories (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Despite the various frames presented by Bolman and Deal (2008), their work is aligned with that of Collins (2001) in that effective leaders and managers integrate these frames with their vision and ambition for the success of their organization as opposed to their personal success. In Collins' (2001) study, he wrote, "The good-to-great leaders never wanted to become larger-than-life heroes. They never aspired to be put on a pedestal or become unreachable icons. They were seemingly ordinary people quietly producing extraordinary results" (p. 28). Great leaders possess humility as well as other

skill sets and attributes. The ability to form and develop relationships, self-confidence, interpersonal skills, and understanding followers are attributes of successful leaders (Collins, 2001; Bolman & Deal, 2008). Leaders of these organizations are steadfast, tenacious, self-willed, and persistent.

Leithwood, Seashore, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) conducted another study based on a business model that informed the education field. Although this study examined the effectiveness of leadership in schools, findings indicated effective school leadership is essential to the success of schools, especially serving African American and Hispanic populations (Leithwood et al., 2004). Practices of effective school leaders included (a) identifying and developing a shared vision and goals that encompass high expectations; (b) developing people by providing individual support; (c) modeling best practices; and (d) leading collaborative organization redesign and efforts during the course of school reform (Leithwood et al., 2004).

School leaders also set measure performance standards, lead by example and model professional behavior for their staff. Goals are clearly defined and set high expectations for and growth of their staff and organization, which in turn leads to continued and long-term success (Leithwood et al., 2004; Kruger, Witziers, & Sleegers, 2007; Murphy, Goldring, & Porter, 2007). Traditional public school leadership lends itself to the field of educational research, but there remains a dearth of research in that of charter school leadership.

Leadership in Traditional Public Schools

Over recent history, the role of a traditional public school principal initially focused on managerial tasks, but currently involves both administrative and leadership endeavors. The changed role was redefined by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2008) as:

> The role of principal continues to become more complex and challenging. Traditional leaders may have considered their jobs to be solely the managers of schools. But the current social and educational context – which combines high-stakes accountability with the high ideals of supporting social, physical and emotional needs of children – demands that principals demonstrate the vision, courage and skill to lead and advocate for effective learning communities in which all students – and adults – reach their highest potential. (p. 2)

School leaders primarily focus on the following tasks: (a) discipline; (b) administering testing; (c) scheduling; (d) student activities; (e) hiring; (f) communicating; (g) problem solving; (h) financing; (i) scheduling; (j) compliance issues; (k) building maintenance; (l) monitoring/observing instruction; m) supporting teachers' professional development; (n) analyzing student data or work; and (o) modeling instructional practices/teaching a class (Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2009, p. 45) Studies also support this shift in role and complexity of principals in traditional public schools. Metlife (2012) conducted a study that involved surveying 500 principals regarding their role and responsibilities in traditional public school settings. Sixty-nine

percent of the surveyed principals indicated their role changed in regards to responsibilities and complexities when compared to the previous five years of service (Metlife, 2012). An additional finding of the study indicated that regardless of the school population, 75% of principals agreed that their role as principal had become more involved and multifaceted (Metlife, 2012).

Five key responsibilities were identified by The Wallace Foundation (2013): (a) shaping a vision of academic success for all students, one based on high standards; (b) creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit and other foundations of fruitful interactions prevail; (c) cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the school vision; (d) improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn at their utmost; and (e) managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement. While these responsibilities may not entirely vary from charter school leaders, traditional public school leaders have more office personnel to assist with the day-to-day operations than charter school leaders.

Another study conducted by Muse and Abrams (2011) revealed that 25 Virginia principals viewed their role not only to be redefined but also versatile. More specifically, these principals led by example, cultivated relationships, created a vision, understood the community, were a manager and instructional leader, and possessed child-centered leadership. Results also indicated the role of principals added to the responsibilities of state and national accountability organizations.

Leadership in Charter Schools

School leadership impacts student learning as well as the quality of a school's teaching staff (Leithwood et al., 2004). "Charter school leadership is a profession that takes passion, vision, and a personal sense of ownership" (Curry, 2013, p. 63). Charter school leaders are uniquely positioned to uplift communities, educate students using innovative teaching methods, and developing fellow educators, all whom represent a school community (Curry, 2013). Charter schools require leaders with a comprehensive array of skills that suit the needs of their complex nature (Kwan, 2010; Kwan & Walker, 2009). These leaders need to be adept at meeting the demands in a unique school setting given they open at a rate of 400 per year (Kwan, 2010; Kwan & Walker, 2009). The expectation of charter school leaders is that they will invoke changes in failing schools and raise the level of achievement in failing schools and students (Robinson & Buntrock, 2011).

A study by Campbell, Gross, and Lake (2008) about charter school leaders determined that 87% came from the field of education while some had municipal and business backgrounds (Finn & Manno, 1998; Robelen, 2008). The study also revealed that 30% of these charter school leaders held the position for less than two years before their appointment to executive director; 12% were under the age of 35, and 19% had ten or more years' experience in education in any capacity (Campbell, Gross, & Lake, 2008). Charter school leaders in this study are typically younger than their peers in traditional educational settings and less experienced, but authors indicated that these leaders were profoundly committed to the mission of their schools. The mission and

purpose of a charter school impact its overall success and is positively associated with the school leader's personal beliefs; 86% of the school leaders surveyed in this study noted that they strongly believed in the mission of their school (Khan, 2012).

Other studies yielded similar results related to charter school leadership. They were found to be dedicated, passionate, courageous, entrepreneurial, and commonly took risks (Bowman, 2001; Starr, 2012; Bierlein, & Mulholand, 1994; Hess, 2009; Ryan & Rottman, 2009). Consistent in the literature regarding charter school leaders is there is an absence of a supportive network, they are typically young in age, autonomous in nature, and dedicated to the school's mission (Aguilar, Goldwasser, & Tank-Crestetto, 2011; Rooney, 2009). While these studies revealed that charter school leaders were relatively young, they worked 70 hours per week despite having less experience before leading their schools (Campbell et al., 2008). The authors suggest that the lack of experience could impact the ways in which they make decisions given the comprehensive array of skills needed to lead their schools.

Roles of charter school principals vary in comparison to traditional public school leaders. The responsibilities of charter school leaders typically include establishing and reinforcing the school's vision, strengthening the skills of teachers and other staff members, overseeing finances and assessments, and managing educational systems designed help students who require specialized academic support (Gross, 2011; Hughes & Moglia-Cannon, 2010). Charter authorizers can also mandate school leaders to instruct classes (Fusarelli, 2002; NAPCS, 2008). While both traditional and charter school leaders contend with challenges regarding school finances and student

achievement, charter school principals have the added difficulty of their school's renewal (Drame & Frattura, 2011). A survey of charter school principals in Colorado revealed that while they were confident in providing safe learning environments, this was not the case with raising parental involvement and managing school finances (Carpenter & Kafer, 2010). In another interview of charter school principals, it was found that despite handling the school's finances, they were able to promptly make decisions without restrictions (Triant, 2001). The superintendent role is often compared to the charter school principal given the added leadership responsibilities and interaction with a board (Dressler, 2001).

While there is a wealth of research regarding the role of charter school leaders, the effects of leadership in charter schools remain largely unexplored to date (Cravens, Goldring, & Peñaloza, 2011), particularly as it relates to cultural competence identity of African American leaders and how they impact teacher faculty development.

African-American Leadership in Charter Schools

While the research on African American leadership is accessible, the topic of charter school leadership is under researched, underdeveloped, and undervalued in the discourse (Banks, 1995; Tillman, 2004; Valverde & Brown, 1988). African American school leadership will be the focus of this section in the hopes that as the research in this study develops, direct links to African American charter school leadership will become less sparse.

There was an unspoken ideology amongst African American principals, "which obligated those who acquired literacy to transfer this knowledge to others in the Black

community" (Savage, 2001, p.173). The African American principal was considered paramount to the education of African American children and held quite a significant role in the community (Tillman, 2004). They were "regarded as the authority on educational, social, and economic issues, responsible for establishing the all-Black school as the cultural symbol of the Black community" (Tillman, 2004, p. 102). Another role of African American principals was to improve educational inequities and social development (Tillman, 2004). They felt a sense of obligation to their community to ensure that all students achieved at their highest potential and they created environments in all-Black schools that nurtured this notion (Siddle Walker, 1996).

A study conducted by Lomotey (1989) compared the leadership of African American to White Americans. White American principals, not only deemed their African American colleagues inferior, but also their ability to lead (Foster, 1995; Delpit, 1995; Sizemore, 1986). Results of the study indicated African Americans placed more emphasis on community involvement than White American principals. African American principals were also found to possess the following attributes: (a) commitment to the education of every student; (b) confidence in the ability of every student to learn, and (c) compassion for and understanding of every student and the communities in which they live (Lomotey, 1989). They were also aligned with traditional ideologies such as goal development, energy harnessing, communication facilitation, and instructional management, all of which are associated with high student achievement (Lomotey, 1989). The belief that all African American children can learn is markedly important to African American principals (James, 1986).

African American principals countered ideologies and individuals who contested the advancement of African American youth (Tillman, 2008). Hilliard and Sizemore (1984) emphasized African American principals to oppose an educational system that perpetuates the marginalization of African American students that frequently labels them as inferior or deficient. Leadership practices of African Americans prioritized the scholastic and social development of African American students and were based on cultural perspectives and interpersonal caring (Tillman, 2008). Their efforts were spent obtaining funding and resources as well as hiring dedicated teachers who exposed African American students to successful opportunities. It was important for African American principals to prepare students to become part of a global society which teaching student to develop self-esteem work ethic, and set goals (Tillman, 2008). However, the historical *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision resulted in the loss of African American principals and influence over African American students. While it did not change their belief that African American students can all learn, Pollard (1997) suggested that moving African American students to other schools impaired their educational success because African American principals were no longer in close proximity. Not only did they no longer teach African American children, but they were demoted to office positions or lower grades or terminated from teaching positions altogether.

Administrative demographics continue to reflect a loss of African American principals in classrooms across the country; the principalship is comprised of 10% of African Americans in comparison to 80% Whites (Hill, Ottem, & DeRoche, 2016). It is

deemed appropriate that African American principals and other administrators of color are in positions of leadership where the students share the same race, ethnicities or cultures (Miklos, 1988). According to Bloom and Erlandson (2003), African American principals who lead these schools encounter low student achievement and graduation rates and high teacher attrition. It is important for principals to incorporate innovative leadership practices that meet the cultural needs of African American students (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). While there is not an abundance of literature regarding African American charter leadership, the attributes of African American leaders in public schools are applicable in the aforementioned setting. African American leadership in charter schools has the potential to provide African American students with the ideal environment for them to interact with those of similar cultural backgrounds. It also affords the opportunity to interact with leaders who can help develop a strong sense of cultural and racial identity that is beneficial to community building and individual success.

Social Justice Leadership

"Leadership for social justice interrogates the policies and procedures that shape schools and at the same time perpetuate social inequalities and marginalization due to race, class, gender, and other markers of difference" (Dantley & Tillman, 2010). African American charter school principals face daily challenges in the provision of a fair and equal education given their student populations are primarily African American and Hispanic:

Unfortunately, the dominant hegemonic (often, White, Westernized) ways of

> understanding and practicing school leadership have been detrimental for minoritized students (Alemán, 2009; Dantley, 2005a; Gooden, 2005; Khalifa, 2013; López, 2003). These understandings are coterminous with race-neutrality, ahistorical, White supremacy, colonialism/postcolonialism, along with other epistemologies that ultimately all lead to aberrant, deficit characterizations and treatment of minoritized students (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016, p. 1286).

It is important, as Khalifa (2015) suggests that Black principals have a responsibility to "reject the cultural and social capital, and proclivities of Black students that blame them for their lower achievement and unique behaviors" as well as challenge the deeply ingrained racism and oppression this country.

Leaders who are not critically self-aware and knowledgeable about racism and other histories of oppression may likely reproduce racism and other systemic oppressions in their schools (Gooden & Dantley, 2012). Marshall & Parker (2010) express that "social justice challenges must be addressed systematically, not with quick fixes" (p. 220). For example, quick fixes include assigning African American students to counselors, social workers, multicultural trainers, special education experts, etc. However, the issues are not fixed and in fact, the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse children are not adequately met. Social justice leaders also need to be cognizant of the notion that "students from diverse backgrounds can and will be "educated" so that they can be "just like us" (i.e., White Euro-American, upper middle class, suburban) (Marshall & Parker, 2010, p. 220). The notion of assimilation and deficit thinking both

demean and impair the goals of social justice leaders and simplifies solving inequities in education.

Social justice leaders "acknowledge the systemic nature of racism, its presence in the nation's public schools, and its aim to disenfranchise people of color" (Beachum & Watson, 2017, p. 96). These leaders attempt, in their daily endeavors and interactions with staff, parents, and students, to face the reality of racism to thwart color-blind school leadership that discounts race and refutes racism (Davis, Gooden, & Micheaux, 2015). There is a sense of urgency for social justice leaders to scrutinize, question and call for reframing of traditions and policies that marginalize culturally and linguistically diverse students (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005). It is not only imperative for social justice leaders to identify ways to lead with core beliefs and strong convictions that create organizational structures that promote social justice, but to also seek existing models of how a social justice framework is attempted and actualized in schools (Marshall & Parker, 2010). They also need to learn from the practices and examples of principals and superintendents who work successfully with teachers, parents, and children in a communal, high-academic achieving, and nurturing environment (Scheurich & Skrla, 2003). African American charter school principals are challenged with meeting these needs while developing their own cultural competence identity and the impact of this identity on their teachers. They are charged with creating a successful educational environment for culturally and linguistically diverse children as well as cultivating a staff that confronts the deeply entrenched racism in academic settings. Interviews with African American charter school principals revealed that they grappled with their role as

social justice leaders and providing an equitable and equal education and will be discussed further in chapter 5.

Theory of Nigrescence

I applied the theory of Nigrescence to understand the identity development of the participants in this study. Developed in 1971 by William Cross, it was referred to as "an identity change process as a Negro-to-Black conversion experience, the kind of process that could be seen as in Black behavior during the Harlem Renaissance (Ritchey, 2014, p. 101). Nigrescence can also be defined as "the developmental process by which a person becomes Black where Black is defined in terms of one's manner of thinking about and evaluating oneself and one's reference groups rather than in terms of skin color per se" (Helms, 1990, p. 17). Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) argue that:

> One must struggle to comprehend the close connection between identity and the self, the role of emotion in shaping identity, the power of stories and discourses in understanding identity, the role of reflection in shaping identity, the link between identity and agency, [and] the contextual factors that promote or hinder the construction of identity (p. 176).

There is difficulty in determining racial identity as it is composed of far more than the color of one's skin. For example, intersectionality addresses the question of how multiple forms of inequality and identity inter-relate in different contexts and over time; for example, the inter-connectedness of race, class, and gender (Crenshaw, 1995). While intersectionality is a suitable approach for the exploration of lived experience as a

means of accounting for complexity and points of intersection, applying this ambiguous and open-ended theoretical approach can lead to multiple meanings that may or may not be desirable (McCall, 2005; Valentine, 2007). Racial identity, however, is multifaceted and amorphous and governed by "one's early social experience, history and politics, conscious input and labeling, and the genetic accident that dictates external appearance" (Chappelle, S., Bigman, L., & Hillyer, 1998). As cited in *Diversity in Action,* Carter (1995) states:

> As an individual grows up as a citizen of the United States, he or she also learns that each citizen belongs to a racial group. The challenge for each individual is to incorporate race into his or her personal identity (Chappelle, Bigman, & Hillyer, 1998, p. 227).

Our racial identity is a state of mind, an acceptance of one's past, present, and future; it also affects our values, understanding of our culture, how we relate to others, and how they relate to us. Due to the nonspecific nature of intersectionality, this ambiguity and open-endedness could potentially provide flexibility and a framework to explore how racial and cultural competence identity become racialized in regards to cultural competence professional development sessions. However, by applying the theory of Nigrescence, this research reveals the importance of understanding the process, not necessarily the intersectionality by which cultural competence identity is formed. The process encompasses five stages: (a) pre-encounter; (b) encounter; (c) immersion-emersion; (d) internalization; and (e) internalization-commitment. In the pre-encounter

stage, "persons hold attitudes that range from low salience to race neutrality to anti-Black (Cross, 1991, p. 101). Individuals were presumed to not only abhor their black identities and possess self-hatred, but also did not embrace their black culture (Cross, 1991). In this stage Cross (1991) suggested that Black people did not accept race as something that impacted their lives. "Persons have frequently been socialized to favor a Eurocentric cultural perspective" (Cross, 1991, p. 193) and not recognize that they were influenced by White Eurocentric ideologies. There is a level of mis-education of Black individuals in this stage, whose identity is awaiting transformation.

The next stage in the theory of Nigrescence is encounter, which involves "shift of ideology and worldview" (Ritchey, 2014, p. 102). "The encounter must work around, slip through, or even shatter the relevance of their ideology and worldview. At the same time, others must provide some hint of direction in which to point the person to be re-socialized or transformed" (Cross, 1991, p. 199). People undergo two steps in this stage; the first where perspectives alter about their race and the second where an individual "takes action as a result of the personal impact the event evoked on that person's world view" (Ritchey, 2014, p. 102). Cross (1991), explained, "the encounter describes a personal experience that temporarily dislodges someone from his or her old world view and identity, thus making the person receptive (vulnerable) to conversion" (p. 159). Black people in the encounter stage are compelled to accept they are part of an oppressed racial group and must accept the consequence of racism in their lives.
In the third stage of Nigrescence there are two specific parts, immersion-emersion (Cross, 1991). During the process of immersion, people begin to shed the old identity

and convert to the new one; they begin to embrace their blackness (Cross, 1991). Those in this stage begin to immerse themselves in their racial identity, operating primarily from a Black perspective. They seek out their Black heritage and culture while becoming energized by an opposition towards Whites (Tatum, 1997). In the emersion process, Black people are able to continue embracing their blackness and make substantial personal growth, but in a much more critical manner (Cross, 1991), however they can also experience negative consequences.

The negative experiences include regression, continuation/fixation, and dropping out. Regression occurs when the "old identity is at war with the emerging, new identity" (Cross, 1991, p. 208). This essentially signifies the person regresses to the pre-encounter stage and begins to reject their blackness. The continuation/fixation negative experience is where "individuals who experience painful perceptions and confrontations will be overwhelmed with hate for white people" (Cross, 1991, p. 208). People remain at this stage and find it difficult to progress. The last negative experience includes two types of drop outs; those who find the "race problem as insurmountable and without solution and those who have achieved a feel-good attitude" (Cross, 1991, p. 209) about their blackness and do not want to move forward with the process.

Black people in the internalization stage have a strong sense of security and acute cognizance of their racial identity:

> Black people begin to think critically about their new-found racial identity and how it has shaped their life. As a result, they embrace what it means to be Black

> and have Black self-love that they exude into the universe (Ritchey, 2014, p. 103)

There is a desire to align themselves with those who have also been oppressed as well as a readiness to create relationships with Whites who acknowledge their Black racial identity (Tatum, 1997). According to Cross (1991), "internalization is not likely to signal the end of a person's concern for nigrescence" (p. 210). It enables an individual to move towards a deeper internalization of racial identity and development of bicultural attitudes as well as a healthier perspective of all the cultures in which they belong (Cross, 1991).

Internalization was later combined with commitment, which focused on the "long-term interest of Black affairs over an extended amount of time" (Ritchey, 2014, p.103). The long-term interests galvanize those in the internalization-commitment stage to take action and commit to issues that impact their race. According to Benjamin, Constantine, Richardson, and Wilson (1998):

> Healthy racial identity development is achieved when Blacks progress through a series of linear stages commencing with degrading thoughts and feelings about themselves and other Blacks accompanied by idealized beliefs about Whites, and ends with internalized positive feelings about themselves, other Blacks, and other racial groups. (p. 96)

The process of Nigrescence occurs for most from one stage to the next, but can sometimes be revisited in a circular manner (Tatum, 1997). As a result of different experiences or life events, our racial identity will be constantly shaped and redefined. Applying the theory of Nigrescence to my study enabled me to explore the process by which African American charter school principals develop their racial identity. Furthermore, this process explored in this theory could potentially unveil how cultural competence identities help to develop teachers in their respective school settings. If principals can assist teachers through this same process particularly through professional development, then there is an opportunity to develop a framework by which all charter school leaders can reflect on and use as a guide.

Challenges with the Theory of Nigrescence

The theory of Nigrescence has provoked researchers to explore the psychological functioning and identity formation of Black people in America. "Cross's initial concept of Black identity formation was precipitated by his observation of some reactive phenomena occurring rather widely during the 1960s, as increasing numbers of Black Americans began to change their self-image, perceptions, attitudes, and social behaviors" (Akbar, 1989, p. 258). Therefore, the theory of Nigrescence must be understood within that context; the context of a reaction to the oppressive conditions of Euro-American racism (Akbar, 1989).

Akbar (1989) also suggests that "Black/African identity is a biogenetically determined core of the Black self" (p. 259). "The acceptance of Nigrescence as core identity rather than role playing would restructure the way one would conceptualize the

formation of Black identity in the life cycle" (Akbar, 1989, p. 260). Remaining in one particular stage would be considered a disorder and would not explain how one moves from one stage to another given social conditions and situations. The association of this theory with core identity signifies that if a solid sense of self is not formed by a particular stage or period of life, then this person will be abnormal, inadequate and perhaps even socially impaired.

In the second stage of the theory of Nigrescence, Cross (1971) identified a negative encounter with racism as the catalyst towards becoming more aware of ones' Blackness and culture. However, Akbar (1989) challenges this idea with the example of Malcom X's spiritual conversion and inspiration he received from Elijah Muhammed's teachings. "This conversion led to further study and development and an enhanced perception of the racism that had characterized his life experience since the death of his father" (Akbar, 1989, p. 260). Identity formation amongst African Americans can therefore also be attributed to a positive encounter as opposed to a negative encounter; "this kind of identity formation appears to be much more stable throughout the life cycle" (Akbar, 1989, p. 261).

Another challenge of the theory of Nigrescence is that it may be best understood as a state rather than a stage (Akbar, 1989). "That is, if the experimenter looked for correlates of a core racial/cultural identity as opposed to reactions to distorted environmental experiences, it might be easier to identify the stable aspects of such an identity" (Akbar, 1989, p. 261). The distinction between a state rather than a stage lends itself to the idea that racial identity is a stable personality trait instead of developmental

reactions that Cross (1971) suggests in his theory. The African American charter school principals interviewed in this study addressed the challenges of this theory as it relates to the development to cultural competence identity and impact on teacher faculty development and will be explored further in chapter five.

Transformative Learning Theory

In this study, the focus of teacher faculty development was also explored through the lens of the transformative learning theory. "Transformative learning theory first emerged in the 1970s with Mezirow's work about how adults make sense of their life experience" (Alfred, Cherrstrom, Robinson, & Friday, 2013, p. 133). According to Mezirow (2012):

> Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (p. 76)

These frames of reference are used to "define our world and include the assumptions and expectations we use to filter and understand our experiences" (Alfred, Cherrstrom, Robinson, & Friday, 2013, p. 133). The premise of this theory is to allow for opportunities of learning to be transformative. Mezirow (2012) identified ten phases of transformative learning: (a) a disorienting dilemma; (b) self-examination of emotions; (c) assessment of assumptions; (d) reflection and recognition of shared discontent; (e)

exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions; (f) planning action steps; (g) gathering information and resources to implement steps; (h) put action plan into effect; (i) build capacity in new roles and knowledge; and (j) integrate new perspective and knowledge into current work.

Meirzow (1991) indicated that in his transformative learning theory, being critically reflective is integral to the learning process because it allows the creation of opportunities for educators to act on new insights during the process. Additionally, this process asks the learner to make his or her suppositions explicit and understood in context so they can be examined, questioned, validated, and revised (Mezirow, 1991). This model requires that the process also must include reflective discourse, or dialogue and communication with others that assists in identification and assessment of the learners' assumptions, frames of reference, and habits of mind (Mezirow, 2000).

The transformative learning theory is significant because it is a solid model for the kind of professional development that is needed to support a collaborative school culture and educator reflection. This theory is also significant and applicable to this study in that teachers use culturally relevant frameworks and assumptions to guide their thinking. The ten-phase process can therefore influence how an individual questions cultural-norms related to learning experiences and generate new frameworks (Alfred, Cherrstrom, Robinson, & Friday, 2013) impacting their teaching skills and student academic performance. Charter school principals can provide professional development sessions that specifically target ways to impact their teacher's development and inform teachers of how to critically reflect on the knowledge given to becoming transformed.

Cultural Competence

Diversity plays an integral role in the United States' current economic and political climate (Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 2009). Educators are faced with the task to provide students with skills that will not only allow them to prosper in a global society, but to also navigate in a diverse world where they must learn to be appreciative and tolerant of those whose culture may differ from their own (Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 2009). In order for educators to provide students with global and diversity awareness, they must first develop cultural competence. Self-examination, self-reflection, self-management, exploration of ones' attitudes and beliefs related to race, culture and individual truths all encompass cultural competence (Gay, 2000; Anderson & Davis, 2012; Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Taliaferro, 2011; & Howard, 2006). LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993) suggest that a:

> Culturally competent individual possesses a strong sense of personal identity, has knowledge of the beliefs and values of the culture, displays sensitivity to the affective processes of the culture, communicates clearly in the language of the cultural group, performs socially sanctioned behavior, maintains active social relations within the cultural group, and negotiates the institutional structures of that culture." (p. 3)

Cultural proficiency is a "process that begins with us, not with our students or their communities" (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009, p. 20). In order to become culturally competent, the process requires those to explore assumptions about themselves as well

as others and their chosen setting (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). Cross, Barbara, Dennis, and Isaacs (1989) define cultural competence as:

> The cultural competence model explored in this monograph is defined as a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or amongst professionals and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. The word cultural is used because it implies the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions, of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group. The word competence is used because it implies having the capacity to function effectively. (p. iv)

It is presumed that school leaders have a greater capacity and understanding of cultural competence and intercultural sensitivity (Hernandez & Kose, 2012). Researchers have not yet determined how they develop these skills as well as ways to reflect on their practice. The Cultural Proficiency Continuum was developed as a means for school leaders to consider their behaviors, values, and practices (Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 1999; Cross et al., 1989). Table 1 summarizes the continuum.

In addition to the cultural proficiency continuum, there are five essential elements that are "the standards for culturally competent values, behaviors, policies, and practices" (Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, p. 65). These elements include: (a) assessing cultural knowledge; (b) valuing diversity; (c) managing the dynamics of difference; (d) adapting to diversity; and (e) institutionalizing cultural knowledge. In the

first element, school leaders are quite cognizant of their culture as well as others. They are also knowledgeable about ways to conduct themselves towards other cultures and know ways to cultivate school cultures that are conducive and welcoming to all (Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 1999). When school leaders value diversity, which is the second element, school leaders "make the effort to be inclusive of people whose viewpoints and experiences are different from yours and will enrich conversations, decision making, and problem solving (Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 1999, p. 65). All cultural groups are important to school leaders in this element and their level of importance impact how they navigate within their schools.

Managing the dynamics is the third essential element of cultural competence and signifies a school leader who understands and acknowledges cultural differences that may lead to conflicts (Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 1999). These leaders are able to address issues that arise between those in their school as well as advocate and model ways to appreciate cultures in their school community. The fourth element of cultural competence is adapting to diversity. In this element, school leaders "have the will to learn about others and have the ability to use others' cultural experiences and backgrounds in educational settings (Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 1999, p. 65). They are able to advance their school towards becoming more culturally competent by purposefully searching ways to experience other cultural backgrounds. In the last element of cultural competence, school leaders institutionalize cultural knowledge. Continual learning about cultural groups, experiences, and viewpoints is fundamental to this element (Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 1999). While leaders are paramount to

this element, they also involve their teachers in the process as well. This could be in the form of professional development and other experiences that purposefully incorporate all cultures represented within their school setting.

Table 1

Cultural Proficiency Continuum with Examples

Cultural Destructiveness	The school leader seeks to eliminate vestiges of the cultures of others
Cultural Incapacity	The school leader seeks to make the culture of others appear to be wrong
Cultural Blindness	The school leader refuses to acknowledge the culture of others
Cultural Precompetence	The school leader becomes aware of what one doesn't know about working in diverse settings. From this initial level of awareness, a person/organization can either move in a positive, constructive direction or falter, stop, and possibly regress.
Cultural Competence	The school leader views one's personal and organizational work as an interactive arrangement in which the educator enters into diverse settings in a manner that is additive to cultures that are different that of the educator
Cultural Proficiency	The school leader makes the commitment to lifelong learning for the purpose of being increasingly effective in serving the educational needs of cultural groups; holding the vision of what can be and committing to assessments that serve as benchmarks on the road to student success

Note. Information from Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 1999, p. 64.

Teacher Professional Development

Student academic achievement is contingent upon school leadership and teacher quality. In order to impact student academic achievement, implement the best evidenced-based educational objectives and improve teaching performance, school leaders and teachers continue to broaden their knowledge base and teaching methods through professional development (Mizell, 2010). Guskey (2000) defines professional development as a combination of "processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students…Professional development is a process that is: (a) intentional; (b) ongoing; and (c) systematic" (p. 16). While the current methods of professional development typically include workshops, conferences, lectures, university classes, in-service trainings, coaching, peer observations and mentoring, researchers believe that they are not always the most effective ways to improve their educational pedagogy. Sparks (2002) states:

> While workshops and courses are the most familiar forms of professional development, they are often not the most appropriate to achieve certain objectives. Many types of activities that cause teachers to collaborate in serious and sustained ways and to reflect on their work and its effects on student learning are important but typically overlooked. (p. 9)

It is not only critical for professional development to be effective, meaningful, and consistent, but to also factor a teacher's individual classroom concerns and needs,

student population, and pedagogical knowledge (Kena, Aud, Johnson, Wang, Zhang, Rathburn, Wilkinson-Flicker, & Kristapovich, 2014; Sparks, 2002, 2007). When sessions are unrelated to the teacher-determined needs, the professional development objectives often remain unfulfilled (Guskey, 2000). In order for professional development to be effective, Guskey (2000) characterizes "high-quality professional development principles" (p. 36; see figure 3).

Figure 3. Illustration of Guskey's four characterizations of high-quality professional development.

In some professional development sessions, Sparks (2002), believes that teachers are lectured and provided teaching methods, but in a very generic and meaningless manner. Aligned with the research regarding the principles of high quality professional development, Sparks (2002) also suggests that teachers need to have opportunities for professional development that are ingrained in daily procedures and teaching activities. Principals can provide these opportunities, especially since they are more familiar with their teacher's needs in their respective educational settings. The ways in which principals develop their cultural competence identities and how this impacts teacher faculty development is key to how they embed the on-going procedurally professional development sessions. A clear understanding of this lends itself to teachable moments both within and outside of the classroom for enhanced growth and performance. Not only is the principal's cultural competence identity strengthened, but also the identity of the teacher.

Principals face a great dilemma in shaping a teacher's cultural competence as this has the potential to impact their own identity and professional growth. Darling-Hammond (1997) captures the challenges facing our teachers today in the following excerpt:

> Meeting the challenge of cultural diversity is an agenda that is central to today's quest to develop schools that can educate all students for the challenging world they face – a world that is both more complex than ever before in our history. The work of educating educators is, at root, the work that will enable us to sustain a productive and pluralistic democracy, for it is the capacities of teachers

> that make democratic education possible - that is, an education that enables all people to find and act on who they are; what their passions, gifts, and talents may be; and how they want to make a contribution to each other and the world. (p. viii)

Even if teachers come to both traditional and charter schools with this understanding it is important that charter school leaders are (secure) in their identity and cultural competence in order to enhance teachers' professional growth. Gay (1993) defines *cultural broker* as a teacher who "thoroughly understands different cultural systems, is able to interpret symbols from one frame of reference to another, can mediate cultural incompatibilities, and knows how to build bridges or establish linkages across cultures." Given the flexibility and autonomy of a charter school, school leaders are in a position to help their teachers develop their "sociocultural awareness," which is an awareness that helps them negotiate their interactions with their students with an understanding that these interactions are mediated by their sociocultural backgrounds. It is not uncommon for school leaders to have difficulty cultivating their cultural competence, particularly when underlying norms and assumptions that reinforce inequitable practices often are deeply embedded in a school's culture and reinforced by societal expectations and power differences. The cultural disconnect that many African American students encounter in schools contributes to their academic underachievement and inability to adapt socially (Lee, Lomotey, Shujaa, 1990). Principals who acknowledge and lead school reform efforts to address the cultural disconnect of African

American students, draw from the pedagogical tenets of cultural responsiveness or culturally relevant instructional practices. School leaders that respond to the complexities of the learning needs of African American students understand the importance of closing the opportunity gap.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy is a major concept in multicultural education that stresses the ability of teachers to respond to their students by incorporating elements students' culture in their teaching (Irvine, 2003). It has been described as using the cultural knowledge, prior experience, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant. The term has the following characteristics (Gay, 2010, pp. 31-32):

a) acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect student's dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum;
b) builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived socio-cultural realities;
c) uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles;
d) teaches students to know and praise their own and each others' cultural heritages; and

e) incorporates multicultural information, resources and materials in all subjects and skills routinely taught in schools.

Research promotes culturally responsive teaching as a vehicle for success in diverse classrooms (Carter, 2003; Gay, 2000; Delpit, 1988). Culturally responsive teaching suggests that underrepresented students "are more likely to learn and achieve when communication, curricula, and instruction are shaped in ways that acknowledge, honor, and reflect their language, heritage, prior knowledge, and learning styles" (Tillman & Scheurich, 2013, p. 443). It also suggests, that "these students are more likely to excel academically when teachers evidence sincere caring and a strong commitment to ensuring high levels of academic success for each student" (Tillman & Scheurich, 2013, p. 443).

African-American Culture

While it is important to understand the need for teachers to show sincerity and a strong commitment to African American children, it is particularly important to understand the ways in which African American charter school principals develop their own cultural competence identity and impact their teaching faculty in relationship to African American culture. Their experiences in this manner are imperative to learn how these principals are guided in their personal and professional lives. "Because the Afro-American experience is not widely understood, and because failure to recognize the integrity of Afro-American culture is a basic weakness of currently dominant views" (Jones, 1983).

Boykin (1983) suggests the existence of at least nine interrelated dimensions of Black culture: (a) *spirituality*, an approach to life as being essentially vitalistic rather than mechanistic, with the conviction that non-material forces influence people's everyday lives; (b) *harmony*, the notion that one's fate is interrelated with other elements in the scheme of things, so that humankind and nature are harmonically conjoined; (c) *movement*, an emphasis on the interweaving of movement, rhythm, percussiveness, music, and dance, which are taken as central to psychological health; (d) *verve*, a propensity for relatively high levels of stimulation, to action that is energetic and lively; (e) *affect*, an emphasis on emotions and feelings, together with a special sensitivity to emotional cues and a tendency to be emotionally expressive; (f) *communalism*, a commitment to social connectedness which includes an awareness that social bonds and responsibilities transcend individual privileges; (g) *expressive individualism*, the cultivation of a distinctive personality and a proclivity for spontaneous, genuine personal expression; (h) *oral tradition*, a preference for oral/aural modes of communication in which both speaking and listening are treated as performances and in which oral virtuosity the ability to use alliterative, metaphorically colorful, graphic forms of spoken language is emphasized and cultivated; and (i) *social time perspective*, an orientation in which time is treated as passing through a social space rather than a material one, in which time can be recurring, personal, and phenomenological (Neisser, 1986, p. 64).

The link between the development of cultural competence identity and the impact on teacher faculty development can be realized through the ways in which African American children learn. Behaviors, beliefs, and inclinations to learn influence

socialization experiences similar to the home environment (Banks et al., 2007; Lee, 2013). A conflict occurs for African American children between their home and school values and can lead to their isolation, difficulty in learning and low academic achievement (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). "One of the most pressing challenges facing these school leaders is how to design a school that transcends cultural differences in order to provide a supportive environment for all students while simultaneously producing high performance on state tests that often disadvantage immigrant students in a variety of ways" (Walls, Ryu, & Johnson, 2017, p. 29). These tests also disadvantage African American children and African American charter school principals are charged with the responsibility of serving these students' academic, social-emotional and cultural needs. While each aspect of these nine dimensions may not apply to every participant nor of the children they serve in this study, it is my goal to uncover which dimension transcends amongst their respective school environments, teaching staff, and student population. This notion can be reconciled through an investigation of African American charter school principals and their openness to providing information regarding their cultural competence identity and impact on teacher faculty development.

Culturally Influenced Learning Styles

In addition to the need for African American charter school principals and teachers to understand African American culture, it is also important to be cognizant of learning styles amongst culturally and linguistically diverse children. The dominant learning style of European Americans is inconsistent with the style of cognition of children from differing cultures (Anderson, 1988; Brislin, 1993; Hilliard, 1988;

McIntyre, 1993; McIntyre, 1996a; Tharp, 1989; Tharp, 1995). Culturally and linguistically diverse children are often taught information in a European-American context therefore negatively impacting academic achievement and do not account for varying learning styles (Dean, Salend & Taylor, 1993; Anderson, 1988; Franklin, 1992). These learning styles are on a continuum from field-independent to field-sensitive/dependent (Anderson, 1988; Dunn & Griggs, 1990; Harry, 1992; Ramirez, 1988).

Researchers suggest European-Americans are typically field independent (Anderson, 1988; Banks & Banks, 1993; Ishii-Jordan & Peterson, 1994). Field independent learners perceive discrete elements from their backgrounds and derive specific information from the "field" (Anderson, 1988; Brislin; 1993). In comparison to field sensitive individuals who associate learning with emotions and intuition, field independent learners are more analytical, impartial, reasonable and matter of fact (Anderson, 1988; Grossman & Grossman, 1994). Before application or practice, field independent learners desire analytical tasks and impersonal materials given their perception of background information (Anderson, 1988).

Field sensitive learners, who are typically culturally diverse students, are more inclined to practice and experimentation prior to theoretical or conceptual discussion (Anderson, 1988). These learners focus on the total context to extrapolate information and at times have difficulty removing unrelated information (Anderson, 1988; Banks & Banks, 1993; Brislin, 1993). Verbal tasks are best for these learners using material that involves human social context, humor or fantasy (Anderson, 1988). They learn best as a

communal group and are more sensitive to the needs and reactions of others (Harry, 1992; Park, Pullis, Reilly, & Townsend, 1994; Anderson, 1988; Witkin, Dyk, Faterson, Goodenough & Karp, 1962). Field sensitive learners thrive in educational settings where they are affirmed by their teachers' belief in their academic ability (Anderson, 1988).

The importance of understanding these learning styles relies heavily on the academic achievement of culturally and linguistically diverse children. African American charter school principals have the responsibility to provide extensive professional development that informs teachers of these learning styles, considering their student population is predominantly African American and Hispanic. Field dependent learners have the potential to be perceived as less competent given their differences in learning styles and being taught by field independent teachers (Anderson, 1988; Gollnick & Chinn, 1990; Harry, 1992). Ramirez and Castaneda (1974) suggest that teachers can meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse children by adjusting their teaching environment allowing students the choice of working on either individual or group projects. Teachers can also partner field-sensitive and field-independent peers in a well-developed program of study leaving students to decide what learning style works best for them. Students can be motivated by peer tutors as well as a display of work that represents both learning styles. This study has the potential to unfold the impact of culture on learning and consider the ways in which African Americans learn to be culturally competent and influence teacher faculty development. Understanding the various learning styles of students in diverse classrooms is a way to connect academic

achievement to culture and decrease the opportunity gap within the United States educational system.

Faculty Development in African-American Public Schools

Independent African-centered schools emphasize the potential that African American children lend to their communities, national and global communities (Lee, 1992). The New Concept Development Center (NCDC) was founded by a group including poets Haki Madhubuti, Johari Amini, and Sterling Plumpp; and educators Safisha Madhubuti (Carol Easton, now Carol Lee), Jabari Mahiri, and Soyini Ricks Walton (Lee, 1992, p. 162). The goal of the center was to cater to Chicago's African American community and teach children about their history and culture as well as values of self-love and cooperation (Lee, 1992). As an independently run institution, it did not necessitate resources and influence outside of the African American community (Lee, 1992). Lee (1992) suggests:

> New Concept Development Center (NCDC) of Chicago, Illinois, along with other independent Black institutions (IBIs) across the country, has strived to educate and socialize African American children to assume their future roles as political, intellectual, spiritual and economic leaders in their communities. Its vision is one in which Black people are self-reliant, productive, self-defining, and firmly rooted in family and community- a vision NCDC's founders and staff hope will be impossible for its students to lose. (p. 161).

The difficulty within African-centered independent schools is the need for teachers to

possess the relevant knowledge and ideological perspectives in the appropriate manner (Lee, 1992). There is also great difficulty with the lack of adequate culturally relevant pedagogy for culturally and linguistically diverse students in mainstream teacher preparation programs. African American charter school principals are in a unique position to implement research-based preparation and professional development for teachers to work with culturally and linguistically diverse children. Lee (1992) suggests "experience has shown that the most effective means of training new staff to engage in NCDC's culturally responsive mode of teaching is to have beginning teachers spend their first year as assistants, or apprentices, to experienced teacher" (p. 164). In addition to their attendance at seminars and workshops offered at local universities and teacher centers, NCDC provided weekly and monthly staff development programs featuring African American history and culture, theories of learning and strategies for culturally responsive manipulatives and teaching units (Lee, 1992).

There are also challenges in the development and support of new administrative leadership in independent schools. Lee (1992) argues directors cannot "simply be imported from another setting (unless, of course, the candidate has had prior leadership experience in another independent school) and that all positions below that of the director are thus seen as training ground for future directors" (p. 165). This passing of the torch maintains the centers' integrity, "enduring spirit of unity, commitment to collective work and responsibility, and institutional and political independence" (Lee, 1992, p. 165). African American charter school principals can learn lessons about effective professional development sessions as well as ways in which they can cultivate

a communal learning center specialized for their culturally and linguistically diverse students. Aspects of preparation and tangible practices of African-centered independent schools have the ability to provide guidance for African American charter school principals that in turn impact teachers in their respective school settings. Through the lens of independent schools, this study could implicitly unfold ways in which African American charter school principals become culturally competent and how this impacts teacher faculty development.

Teacher Efficacy

Principals are in a position to shape these daily practices and enhance skills that show them all students can reach their highest potential. This is quite relevant given teachers often begin their careers that reflect training that was rooted in a deficit model. They have a low sense of efficacy as a teacher of underserved students and assume because of genetic, cultural or experiential differences are inferior to other children; that is they have a deficit (Nieto, 2000). Teachers are trained to focus on student academic weaknesses that are the basis for their lesson plans and that their socioeconomic status drives their classroom deficits. The deficit model paralyzes many teachers, because they believe that circumstances in the student's life prevent learning. When teachers engage in deficit thinking, their daily educational practices communicate messages that student outcomes are beyond their control. They also manifest assumptions that trying makes little differences and situational factors cause student success or failure. Situational factors include thinking students who come from two-parent households with middle-class incomes, display middle-class values and live in middle-class

neighborhoods, or better, then success will follow. It is also presumed that poverty-stricken neighborhoods and one-parent families yield inevitable student failure.

Hegemonic Behaviors

Teachers may also engage in hegemonic behaviors that further perpetuate a lack of cultural competence and gives rise to deficit thinking. Apple (1996) defines:

> The terms hegemony refers to a process in which dominant groups in society come together to form a bloc and sustain leadership over subordinate groups. One of the most important elements that such an idea implies is that a power bloc does not have to rely on coercion [because the subordinate groups] feel as if their concerns are being listened to. (pp. 14-15)

It is a subtle form of discrimination in which the person being discriminated against does not realize that is occurring. Those in the discriminated group will identify themselves as receiving just treatment. Students are often in positions where they believe their schools to be safe, fair, and just environments, but it is in those very places where this subtle discrimination occurs. Teachers who show this behavior lack a knowledge base and the will to fully engage and understand other cultures and ethnic groups. It contributes to low expectations and students feeling devalued.

Summary

When a teacher begins to embody a model of resilience, this permeates in their classroom teaching and the ways in which they interact with their students and families. There is a focus on building strengths of students and focus on high expectations of all

students in their classrooms; student outcomes are a direct result of factors within the classroom. Teacher efficacy has to do with the extent to which a teacher believes he or she can actually teach children and make a difference in their lives (Bandura, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Researchers suggest that teacher efficacy is linked with teachers who are successful with students who have been traditionally underserved. Bandura (2001) believes that teacher efficacy is associated with a teacher's belief that students in their classroom can learn and they can teach them. Student achievement, particularly with students of color, is also related to teacher efficacy and expectations (Bennett, 1995; Nieto, 2000). Teachers, who are highly efficacious, have a sense of well-being and remain longer in the profession (Merchant & Carter, 2004). These teachers also believe they can manage their time and classrooms, produce desired outcomes, and spend more time planning, organizing and teaching (Blanson, 2005). Highly efficacious teachers are open to learning about and implementing new and innovative teaching methods that best serve their students (Hoy, 2004). It is important for principals to engage their teachers to become highly efficacious as well as culturally competent. "Principals, thus, should provide differentiated professional development for individual teachers or small groups of teachers with similar equity consciousness needs, just as teachers in classrooms should provide differentiated instruction for individual students or small groups of students with similar needs" (Skrla, McKenzie, & Scheurich, 2009). Marshall and Oliva (2006) encourage staff to attend professional development that focuses on culturally and linguistically appropriate or differentiated instructional approaches to that benefit diverse learners. It was the goal of this study to explore and

interpret how principals engage in their own formation of culturally competent identity as well as how this behavior impacted teachers in their respective school settings, particularly in regards to professional development.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

"Decades before what we now call 'qualitative research' or 'qualitative inquiry' became popular, anthropologists and sociologists were asking questions about people's lives, the social and cultural contexts in which they lived, the ways in which they understood their worlds, and so on" (Merriam, 2009, p, 7). African American charter school principals from various grade levels in urban districts will be chosen to participate in this study. These participants, schools and grade levels were chosen to increase comprehensiveness of the study. All participants received a pseudonym. In addition, specific questions asked of participants followed a designated instrument. The aim of the study was to elicit spoken language to describe the participants' experiences and gain insight into the phenomenon of educational leadership for African American principals of charter schools. My partiality and personal experiences as a former charter school faculty member impacted what I sought to study; therefore, I used interpretive and thematic analysis as part of the research design. "Interpretive approaches aim to produce fine-grained explorations of the way a particular social reality has been constructed" (Pozzebon, Rodriguez, & Petrini, 2014, p. 13). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggest:

Interpretive bricoleur understands that research is an interactive process shaped by one's personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity and those of the people in the setting. The product of the interpretive bricoleur's labor is a complex, quilt-like bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage; set of fluid, interconnected

images and representations. This interpretative structure is like a quilt, a performance text, or a sequence of representations connecting the parts to the whole. (p. 5-6)

Background

After Mendez v. Westminster in 1947, Brown v. Board of Education marked the turning point in Black education in the United States. Ladson-Billings (1998) stated:

> First, historically, the *Brown* decision helped the USA in its struggle to minimize the spread of communism to so-called Third world nations. In many countries, the credibility of the USA had been damaged by the widely broadcast inequitable social conditions that existed in the USA in the 1950s…Second, *Brown* provided reassurance to Blacks that the struggle for freedom and equality fought for during World War II might become a reality at home. (p. 16)

Unfortunately, equality of access and equity of outcomes for African Americans in regards to education never actualized. Not only did African American students relocate to desegregate schools, but many African American principals experienced similar relocation. Southern states were greatly impacted; African American administrators decreased from about 16% to 7% (Valverde & Brown, 1988). African Americans comprise 10% of administrators compared to over 80% of European Americans (NCES, 2010).

District

Over half of charter schools, 55.4%, are located in cities, over 20% in suburban areas, 7.4% in towns and 16% in rural areas (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

There are more charter schools in South and over a third (37.2%) of the country's charter schools are located in the West than in other parts of the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Despite a heavy concentration of charter schools in the South and West, this proposed study included charter schools in districts nationwide and across varying grade levels.

Research Design

I used qualitative research methods were utilized in this study, specifically interviews, in order to examine and interpret the cultural competency identities of African American charter school principals and the impact on teacher faculty development. I believe the perspectives and experiences of the African American charter school principals possess the power to impact educational researchers and leaders in charter school settings regarding the development of cultural competence identities. In addition, through an interpretive perspective I also explored charter school principals' cultural competence identities and how these identities impacted teacher development. "A central characteristic of qualitative research is that individuals construct of reality in interaction with their social worlds" (Merriam, 2009, p. 22). Qualitative researchers emphasize natural settings and the researcher acting as the human instrument (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; and Patton, 1990). This essentially signifies that humans naturally inquire and acquire information without difficulty through conversation with others, watching their actions, analyzing their artifacts, answering to non-verbal cues, and discerning the subtle signs they may indicate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Van Maanen (1983) suggested, "qualitative methods include a variety of

interpretive techniques that seek to describe, code, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world." (p. 9). The interpretivist paradigm relies heavily on this array of techniques for a deeper understanding of the social phenomena being studied. My study engaged multiple means of inquiry, but primarily focused on the interpretation of this understanding and occurred with the least disturbances to the natural setting.

Many researchers define the core characteristics of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). These characteristics include:

a) Natural Setting: Qualitative researchers collect data in the setting where participants experience the social phenomena occurs. Speaking directly with participants and watching them in in their natural setting is a crucial aspect of qualitative research;

b) Researcher as the key instrument: Qualitative researchers develop their own protocol and gather the data individually. There is not an outside reliance on previously created qualitative instruments;

c) Multiple sources of data: Qualitative researchers do not use one data source and incorporate multiple forms of data including interviews, observations, artifacts, and audio or visual information;

d) Inductive and deductive data analysis: Qualitative researchers construct their concepts, classifications, and themes into abstract units until a cohesive dataset of themes is achieved. The researcher then determines if

the study yields support of each theme or if additional data is required;

e) Participants' meanings: Qualitative researchers emphasize the meaning of participants' accounts of their lived realities more than the researchers' perspectives and written discourse;

f) Emergent design: Qualitative researcher's plans are emergent in that they are subject to change during the research process;

g) Reflexivity: Qualitative research considers the role of the researcher as part of the study as well as how their personal positions, encounters and cultures determine the direction of the study in a much more impactful way than researcher bias; and

h) Holistic account: Qualitative researchers strive to establish an intricate description of the phenomenon being studied through multiple perspectives, eventually revealing the bigger idea, theme, or picture.

As the instrument for data collection and analysis in this study, I worked to obtain a thick description of African American charter school principal's cultural competence identities and how their cultural competencies impact teacher faculty development through open-ended questions. To understand this phenomenon, I chose to conduct interviews as a means for participants to share their personal narratives:

> Interviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior. A basic assumption in in-depth interviewing research is that the meaning people

> make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience…Interviewing allows us to put behavior in context and provides and access to understand their action. (Seidman, 1998, p. 4).

The goal for these interviews center on the need to reveal the intricacies of charter school leadership as African American individuals and how their cultural competency identities impact teacher faculty development in their respective schools.

Purposeful Sample

Purposeful sampling ensured all the participants possess primary knowledge and experience regarding the phenomena under study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998). In addition to knowledge and experience, Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) note the importance of availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner. Creswell (2009) states that the researcher should "identify the purposefully selected sites or individuals…that will best help the researcher [to] understand the problem and the research question" (p. 178). Finally, I wished to gain a "depth of understanding" (Patton, 1990, p. 1) to enlighten rather than infer from a sample to a population. The employed methodology must be aligned with the type of sampling (Bernard, 2002; Spradley, 1979; Patton, 2002).

I also used a "small pool of initial informants to nominate other participants who meet the eligibility criteria" (Morgan, 2012, p. 816) for my study, otherwise known as snowball sampling. This method of purposive sampling was best suited when there are

no direct ways for searching for participants. The few participants or informants who were part of my study were familiar with people who shared similar characteristics and met eligibility.

Procedures

After receiving participants' consent, I assigned pseudonyms and conducted interviews. The criteria for selecting participants included:

a) African American charter school principal;
b) Served or currently serve in an educational leadership position for at least two or more years;
c) Charter school was renewed or given provisions to abide by for renewal by the state or district charter authorizer; and
d) Participants completed a survey that determines level of cultural competence.

Implementation

Stake (1995) describes the power of interviews:

> Much of what we cannot observe for ourselves has been or is being observed by others. Two principle uses of case study are to obtain the descriptions and interpretations of others. The case will not be seen the same by everyone. Qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case. The interview is the main road to multiple realities. (p. 64)

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) suggest that in a qualitative study, the researcher seeks answers to questions that emphasize how social experience is created and given meaning. Also, as part of a qualitative study, I acted as a human instrument in obtaining information (Patton, 2002). There is an added benefit of acting as a human instrument in that it allows the researcher to investigate "nonverbal and verbal communication, process, clarify, and summarize the data immediately, and probe for further information" (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

I served as the primary instrument in this study and the interviews served as the primary source of data regarding the participant's views of their identity, cultural competence and impact on teacher faculty development. Following a review of literature, the interview protocol was created as well as other questions based on my personal and professional experiences that aligned with the study.

It is recommended that naturalistic interviews employ an interview guide, or schedule as it is sometimes called (Merriam, 2009). Given, this is a semi-structured methodology, the interview guide contained several specific questions that were asked of every participant and open-ended questions that were used to probe relevant personal, African American charter school leadership identity and cultural competence and impact on teacher faculty development. Conducting the interviews in this manner provided the autonomy to create questions that engaged a conversational style as well as opened up the possibility of subsequent interviews if there is a need for further clarification, expansion or substantiation.

I conducted interviews at a mutually agreed upon location, all scheduled in advance to avoid scheduling conflicts, postponements, or cancellations. All audiotapes and field notes were organized and reviewed as well as locked and stored. Merriam (2009) suggested:

> Field notes should be *highly descriptive.* What is described are the participants, the setting, the activities or behaviors of the participants, and what the observer does. By *highly descriptive* I mean that enough detail should be given that readers feel as if they are there, seeing what the observer sees. (p. 130)

While field notes are highly descriptive, it is possible for information, ideas, memories, and details from interviews to be lost as the research process continues. The brain begins to re-order the material and make connections within and outside of the interviews (Wengraf, 2001). Ashmore and Reed (2000) suggest field notes cannot be replayed, meaning events are unable to be encountered more than once. Therefore, audiotaping also added an advantage to this study because the files could be reused and reanalyzed throughout the process. Not only does this allow for the researcher to check for reliability, but also according to Crichton and Childs (2005), working from the recording better renders the voices of participants. Their reasons for arguing this are that the audiotape allows researchers to hear intonation, passion, pauses, and inflections throughout the analysis process. Although I sent the audiotapes out to be transcribed, I reviewed them to further verify the participant's responses. All participants received a

copy of their interview transcript for validation and were allowed an opportunity for error correction.

Data Collection

DeMarrais (2004) defines an interview as "a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study" (p. 55). The most common form of interview is the person-person encounter in which one person elicits information from another and is deemed to be the most effective of data collection techniques (Merriam, 2009). In order to inform this study, participants were asked open-ended questions during semi-structured face-to-face interviews allowing for their expression of opinions, perspectives and salient experiences. The most well-known strategy to shore up the internal validity of a study is known as *triangulation* (Merriam, 2009). Incorporating a variety of data sources and methods to triangulate the information collected "reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomena in question" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5).

In order to achieve this in-depth understanding of the phenomena in question, I digitally audiotaped interviews, wrote field notes based on observations, recorded non-verbal cues, and wrote detailed narrations of participant experiences. Detailed descriptions of people's activities, behaviors, actions, and the full range of interpersonal interactions and organizational processes that are part of observable human experience include data from observations (Patton, 2005). The advantage of observations is that I had the opportunity of viewing a setting and participants in an unfiltered view. Punch (1998) suggests direct observation occurs when "the observer is an outsider and neither

manipulate nor stimulate the behaviour of those whom they are observing... The situation being observed is not contrived for research purposes" (p. 185). To ensure confidentiality, participants were guaranteed the safety of their personal information before interviews took place in conjunction with a human subject form.

Plan for Analysis

The goal of my study was to understand African American charter school principals' behavior they construct through their expressed ideas and feelings about their cultural competency identities and how this impacts teacher faculty development. My data collection was primarily attained through interviews, observations, and field notes. Interviews were audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, and reexamined for accuracy. Following each interview and observation, I coded the data to categorize and interpret ideas into meanings, themes, and patterns. I applied thematic analysis in this study to interpret the collected data from African American charter school principals.

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe codes as tags or labels researchers assign to whole documents or segments of documents (i.e., paragraphs, sentences, or words) to help catalogue key concepts while preserving the context in which these concepts occur (see figure 4). For example, Miles and Huberman (1994) begin their method of analysis with reduction of data. According to these authors, reduction of data centers on combining all collected data, determining useful data, and removing extraneous data. These same authors suggest presentation of data involves categorization using codes and naming themes from participant responses. Codes also aid researchers in categorizing data by topic, drawing connections, developing theoretical concepts, and identifying themes

(Richards & Morse, 2007). Finally, Miles and Huberman (1994), in their third step of thematic analysis focus on deducing/validating conclusions. In doing so, they suggest interpreting a narrative from the themes by continually moving back to reduction and through presentation of data in completing the analysis.

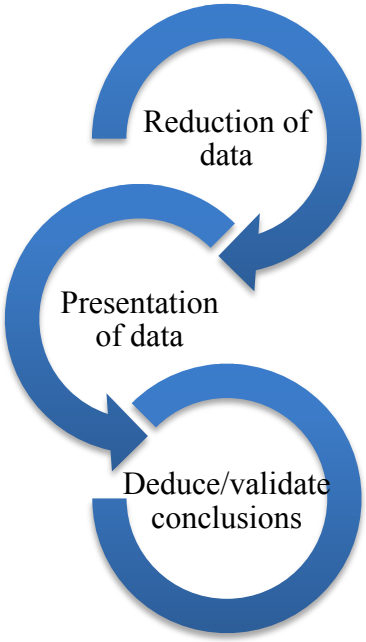


Figure 4. Illustration of thematic analysis approach. Source: Miles M.B., & Huberman M. (1994). Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

I reduced and organized all eight of the transcripts from my interviews and field notes, discarding data that did not answer the research questions. Although I considered the discarded data unnecessary, it remained accessible throughout the study if any

unexpected findings arose. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest the presentation of data should be in the form of tables, charts, networks and other graphical layouts. This occurred in a repetitive and iterative process throughout a study and enabled me to review the determined themes. After displaying the data, I began to develop conclusions regarding my findings. I used my field notes to verify the findings and determined that I needed to collect further data with each participant.

The analysis of this behavior is intended to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena as the researcher becomes more immersed in the data (Merriam, 2009). Setting and context is important in a participants' frame of reference as it enables the development of theory, constructs, and meaning (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Qualitative data analysis is:

> The classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what it represented in it. Meaning-making can refer to subjective or social meanings. Qualitative data analysis also is applied to discover and describe issues in the field or structures and processes in routines and practices. Often, qualitative data analysis combines approaches of a rough analysis of the material (overviews, condensation, summaries) with approaches of a detailed analysis (elaboration of categories, hermeneutic interpretations or identified structures). The final aim is often to arrive at generalizable statements by comparing various materials or various texts or several cases. (Flick, 2013, p. 5)

Merriam (2009) suggests that data analysis is a "recursive and dynamic" (p. 169), signifying that data collection occurs at the beginning of the process and continues after the prescribed research plan has been carried out. Data analysis "begins by identifying segments in your data set that are responsive to your research questions" (Merriam, 2009, p. 176).

Additional Data Collection Techniques

I utilized additional data collection in order to further the interpretation of data in the study including digital audio recording, field notes, and non-verbal cues.

Digital Audio Recording. Each participant interview was digitally recorded. I examined and edited each transcribed interview for authenticity. The advantage of this technique allows the researcher "to record accounts that are both detailed and accurate" (Stringer, 2014, p. 110).

Field Notes. Marshall and Rossman (2011) suggest, "to record what they observe in the field, qualitative researchers rely on fieldnotes or detailed, nonjudgmental (as much as possible), concrete descriptions of what has been observed" (p. 139). In my study, field notes are a relevant technique because they have the capacity to focus on how the participants make meaning of their experiences in context, but also on how their emotions relate to these experiences, thus producing a rich written discourse.

Non-verbal Cues. According to Keegan (2008), non-verbal cues supplement verbal messages in qualitative research. Non-verbal cues in my study include "bodily expression such as eye or facial movements, posture, actions, vocal cues or signals such

as crying, shouting or silences" (Keegan, 2008, p. 563). Vocal cues also encompass vocal quality, pausing, accent or inflection patterns (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Trustworthiness and Credibility

"Trustworthiness provides qualitative researchers with a set of tools by which they can illustrate the worth of their project outside the confines of the often ill-fitting quantitative parameters" (Given & Saumure, 2008, p. 896). Transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability are other standards qualitative researchers use to establish trustworthiness of a study. I utilized interviews, observations, and field notes to triangulate and aid in the trustworthiness of my study. Combining multiple methodological practices is a strategy that not only adds to the rigor and virtue of a study, but also provides qualitative researchers with enhanced meaning and interpretation of the data. Relational and procedural ethical standards were maintained with participants in my study by ensuring their privacy and confidentiality. Member checks and peer-review process were also used to safeguard credibility.

Member Checking

Member checking is defined as the process where the researcher follows up with the participants to verify that the findings are aligned with the intended meanings (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Patton 2002). Qualitative researchers view this as a necessary step in the process of determining trustworthiness of a study. Member checking allows participants to be part of the data analysis process where they can confirm the information given during the study. All participants received a copy of the interview transcripts for examination, explanation, and, modifications.

Transferability

Transferability reflects the scope of a qualitative study and the applicability to different contexts (Given & Saumure, 2008). While it is often compared to generalizability, transferability yields a qualitative researcher with meaningful findings that can be applied to other contexts or individuals. As a qualitative researcher, my goal was for my study to reach others within my field and elsewhere.

Dependability and Confirmability

According to Stringer (2014):

> Dependability focuses on the extent to which people can trust that all measures required of a systemic research process have been followed. An inquiry audit provides a detailed description of the procedures that have been followed and provides the basis for judging the extent to which they are dependable. (p. 94)

In other words, if the study were to be repeated, then I would obtain the same results. Dependability was achieved by clearly detailing all procedures in my study, reviewing records for correctness as well as substantiating artifacts. Stringer (2014) also suggests "researchers must be able to confirm that the procedures described actually took place" (p. 94). This strategy, otherwise known as confirmability, enables the researcher to observe the data and helps in confirming the trustworthiness of the study. To demonstrate confirmability, I collected documentation including records of the inquiry process, audio recordings and notes from participant interviews and discussions as well

as hard copies of each transcriptions created throughout the study. All documentation collected during my study was available for review upon request.

Summary

"Qualitative inquiry seeks to discover and to describe in narrative reporting what particular people do in their everyday lives and what their actions mean to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 43). Given the focus of my study, this methodology was deemed appropriate to interpret the understanding African American charter school principals have of their cultural competence identities and how that impacts teacher faculty development in their school settings. The aim of naturalistic inquiry research emphasizes behavior of people in natural settings while engaging in life experiences (Owens, 2012). This type of inquiry was best suited to explore the lived experiences and narratives of the African American charter school principals. Their leadership perspectives about their cultural competence identity and impact on teacher faculty development, has the potential to shape others within the field.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

I will share the voices of eight African American charter school principals and how their cultural competence identities impacted teacher faculty development in their respective school settings. The responses of these African American charter school principals offered a thick description of their stories and personal interpretations of their experiences. The use of field notes and audio taping enabled me to obtain meaning from each data set. After assigning pseudonyms to each participant, data were organized by participant background and interviewee responses.

Cuba Cruise

Cuba Cruise's Background

Born at the end of World War II on the Tuskegee Army Air Base, Cuba was the oldest of four children. She and her family later moved to Cleveland, Ohio and as a young child, she always enjoyed taking care of her siblings. When people would ask her what she wanted to be when she grew up, she would frequently answer that she wanted to be a mommy. Her father was afraid that she wasn't sharing career goals and suggested that she become a teacher as well as open up and lead her own school. "I think when people ask you that question, they're asking you what career you might want. He was probably thinking, "Oh no, this girl's going to grow up and be a welfare mother with a hundred children, better change this course." Throughout her secondary education, her community knew she wanted to be a teacher and later lead her own school. As a result, she set off to Central State University to study education. She

taught for ten years, saved her money and went to the bank, and asked for a loan to open her own school. During her teaching tenure, she developed her own curriculum, which was influenced by her experiences as a youth in the 50s and 60s. While a student at Central State University, a radical environment existed. For example, she participated in taking over the administration building, prompting the involvement of the National Guard. In addition to these experiences, an African Center and the presence of Black Power greatly impacted her curriculum.

After completing the curriculum, Cuba Cruise opened her first tuition-based independent school in 1977. Her school opened as an infant center, ranging from six weeks old to five years of age so that children could transition into kindergarten. All children in her neighborhood attended the school, including her own children. As her school population grew, she added a grade level each year, eventually growing to the eighth grade. Twenty-two years after the school opened, the charter school movement gained momentum across the country. People in her community encouraged her to open a charter school that was tuition-free. Taken by her community's encouragement, she opened her charter school in 1999 and featured an African centered curriculum and approach. Today, she provides educational leadership in two schools and will celebrate the 40th anniversary of her first school in October. Cuba Cruise spoke openly about her pride in her alumni, explaining how one of her former students became a playwright and another became an obstetrician-gynecologist.

Cuba Cruise's Interview

I contacted the charter school association in Cuba Cruise's city to help identify a participant. The executive director showed interest in my study and provided Cuba Cruise with my contact information. When Cuba Cruise contacted me to schedule an interview, she expressed that it was a very busy time of the year. The planning was underway for the upcoming school year and she was preparing for her students and teaching staff. She provided one possible date and time that worked with her schedule and we agreed on a site to conduct the interview. While we spoke on the phone, Cuba Cruise happily agreed to serving as a participant. "I know what it was like when I did my doctorate and getting data, I will help where I can."

Cuba Cruise met me at the church she attends near her school. Upon entering, she greeted me with a hug, "In our community, we hug. It's very nice to meet you." We exchanged pleasantries and she led me to a table on the side of the room where people typically congregate to worship. She was dressed in leggings and an African printed shirt, casual attire before the school year began. How fitting was her shirt, given it was an African-centered school. When we sat down at the table, she gave me a few documents regarding the history and current report about the school. Around the congregation were pictures of ancestors who were part of their church and a table that was filled with candles. Cuba Cruise later explained that she has something similar in her school where the students give offerings and libations. Also on the walls were posters and African masks. The blinds were black, red and green reminiscent of the colors of Africa.

She asked me about my program of study and what I was planning to do once I completed my degree. I always find this question interesting and realized that is the time for my elevator pitch. After answering her question, Cuba Cruise rested her arms on the table, glancing at her watch. Indicating she was ready to begin, I set up my recording app and computer. I asked her to tell me about her background including ethnicity, education, family background/structure, and upbringing. She emphasizes growing up during the 60s on the Tuskegee Army Air Base and how that led to her opening her own school. My next questions pertained to cultural competence and teacher faculty development.

Mirrors reflect Black gems. Mirrors reflect Black gems represents a theme I found in my analysis of Cuba Cruise's data. She shared a memory about growing up on a Tuskegee Army Base during the 60s and how racial inequality was the norm she faced every day. I was angered about how racially charged experiences shaped her cultural competence identity and professional life. Her experience also left me feeling despondent because it further confirms how our nation continues to suffer insurmountable racial inequities constantly testing our spirit. Cuba Cruise's memory described her cultural competence identity as a Black gem who dedicated her life to preparing strong, competent Black children for the inequities they would face:

I grew up when everything was segregated, so from the very beginning, it was in your face. I always knew that the class and race, that is the ruling class and race, wasn't mine and that I wanted our story to be heard. Growing up I always wanted to go to the Cincinnati Zoo and the King's Island amusement park. My aunt said we couldn't go

because Blacks were not allowed. I let our students know that there's genius in their genes. They are the mothers and fathers of all humanity and that they have a responsibility to their community and to the world to make it a better place.

She reminds her students about the importance of being a Black gem, always basking in their reflection as individuals with extraordinary abilities. The racial adversity they will face, and perhaps currently face, is familiar to Cuba Cruise; her students were a mere reflection of her. She reminds them of the importance to persevere in a society that views Black and Brown children in a negative light, pushing through and accomplishing any of their dreams.

Breaking bread but not breaking shackles. When I practiced as a speech-language pathologist in a charter school in New York City, I attended professional development sessions with my colleagues conducted by our principal. I recalled walking into our staff room where teachers were gathered around a table of food, making plates of muffins or bagels and pouring glasses of orange juice. Teachers discussed their evenings the night before as they prepared for the session. Our principal began addressing the book we read as a staff, *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*. Despite reading the book, there were teachers who made comments such as, "At best these kids will work at McDonalds." It was clear we simply gathered to "break bread," and teachers who held deficit perspectives of Black and Brown children persisted. In a discussion between hooks and West (1991), they expressed "the combination of the notion of community which is about sharing and breaking bread together, of dialogue as well as

mercy because mercy speaks to the need we have for compassion, acceptance, understanding, and empathy (p. 1). It became even clearer there was no mercy, compassion, acceptance, understanding and empathy for these Black and Brown children. The principal did not engage in any formal framework or workshop to discuss the topic and nor did she address the derogatory comment the teacher made; the shackles continuing to hold Black and Brown children in the position an education is meant to change.

The theme breaking bread, but Not breaking shackles, became evident in the analysis of Cuba Cruise's data after sharing information about professional development sessions she provided for her teaching staff:

> We have developed our own curriculum. It's called African centered interdisciplinary multi-level hands on science. I give professional development workshops to my staff on our curriculum. I supervise their monitor, supervise their teaching of the curriculum, give them the authority to purchase things to further enhance their teaching of the curriculum and plan professional development retreats to give them more information on African centered education and learning. Sister Abena Walker is a specialist in African centered education and so I had her one year to do the workshop on that. We went to the Wyndham Resort and spent overnight retreat over there, because I'm an owner at the National Harbor Wyndham Resort. She would speak. She would have a PowerPoint. She would have questions and answers. She would have group discussions. Dr. Zulu, who founded the first African centered school in the

United States here in DC, he's here in DC. Ujamaa Shule is the name of the school. I've had him come and also do a workshop on African centered education. He would also do PowerPoints and everything.

Perhaps the speakers who conducted the professional development sessions put together their own power point presentations Cuba Cruise referenced. However, she did not refer to any formal cultural competence workshop or framework of which her guest speakers followed. Breaking bread will not help students of color break the shackles our society puts on them, both within schools and prisons.

Shattering oppression. During the interview with Cuba Cruise, I asked her to share experiences with teachers who had difficulty with cultural competence and those who did not. While she was able to identify staff who were culturally competent, she provided a hypothetical answer regarding a teacher who struggled in this area. My contention is principals have the responsibility of nurturing teachers who show strong cultural competence, constantly pushing them to grow and influence others. They also have a responsibility to determine if a teacher who struggles with cultural competence should be provided coaching and other forms of professional development to address their difficulties. In some instances, principals can decide if a teacher's level of cultural competence is not appropriate for Black and Brown children. Whether they choose to nurture, work with or dismiss a teacher, their actions shatter oppression.

Cuba Cruise shared an experience regarding a teacher, whose cultural competence skills were strong:

> All of them in their own way. I would say Baba Kamara, that's our male teacher and he is highly socially competent. He brings forth a lot of African identity, Ethiopian identity, Rastafarian identity. He brings forth a lot of knowledge and facts about history. Art is the big promising thing that I can think of with him. We had a girl, Akina, who is in high school now, and she entered the Google contest, Google doodle, doodle Google, whatever it's called, and she won. It was over thousands of dollars that she won. She was interviewed by the newspaper, and she gave all the credit to Baba Kamara who taught her about her history and her culture and showed her how to do artistically things ... That went all over the country.

When asked about an experience with a teacher who struggled with cultural competence, Cuba Cruise initially indicated there were not any staff members with this difficulty. In our follow-up interview, I asked Cuba Cruise to think about a teacher who hypothetically had difficulty with cultural competence and how she would address them. She identified oppressive behavior a teacher could exhibit when working with Black and Brown children:

> I would know if they have any issues with cultural competency if they gave light-skinned students something better than dark-skinned students, or kids with longer, straighter hair more benefit than those with more kinky hair. Things like that. I would counsel them through education, cultural education that I would provide or send them to a specific training.

The hypothetical act of providing counseling or nurturing the work of Baba Kamara in her school were meant to shatter the oppression that many students of color face daily in urban charter schools. Cuba Cruise remained dedicated to ensuring Black and Brown children were not dehumanized in her school, growing up to be productive citizens aware of their cultural heritage and responsibility to themselves and those around them.

Purple Pauline

Purple Pauline's Background

Purple Pauline was born in Guyana. Both of her parents, including her grandparents were educators. She has five children and became really interested in Montessori education when her oldest son was a baby, ultimately deciding against becoming a pediatrician. While growing up, the message about education was that she could do whatever she wanted to do; her mother stressed education and made sure that Purple Pauline and her siblings did their homework. In the 70s, Guyana went through a period of self-identity as a newly independent country and was surrounded by Black power and "a lot of empowerment of Black people." The country's leaders were Black, and while there were class and race issues in Guyana, these issues did not cause her any concern. Although surrounded by Black leaders, money represented the major factor prohibiting her from accomplishing her educational dreams. She graduated high school at the age of 16 and attended the University of Guyana, an institution tied to the University of the West Indies.

Purple Pauline served as the principal of her Montessori charter school for four years after leaving due to standardized testing the charter school board implemented. She did not find it feasible, fair, or even culturally appropriate to test students who were two and three years old. Purple Pauline felt standardized testing in the Montessori setting at a young age, negated the very philosophy of Maria Montessori.

Purple Pauline's Interview

Purple Pauline and I agree to interview at a public library. I met her there after her work day in a conference room with one table and four chairs. The walls were painted a bright yellow; making the lights in the room even brighter. She is dressed in purple African attire; a skirt, shirt and head dress. I rush to set my computer and recording app on my phone because I was ten minutes late trying to find a parking spot. She expressed that she lives a few minutes away and her husband was with her five children at home, so she was not pressed for time. I start by asking Purple Pauline about her background including ethnicity, education, family background/structure, and upbringing. She provided a rich historical and educational context about Guyana including race and class issues she witnessed growing up.

Mirrors reflect Black gems. Purple Pauline's data disclosed the theme mirrors reflect Black gems. While Purple Pauline shared childhood memories nurturing both her cultural competence identity and professional life, a more recent memory supported this theme. While completing Montessori training, Purple Pauline reflected an individual who was very clear about being African American and the strength of what African American individuals bring to our community. She became the Black Gem who was

committed to providing students a Montessori education that included information about all cultures. As she shared her experience, I was both proud and angry about how the history of African Americans and other cultures including people of color is at times either altered or excluded altogether. This Black gem's actions mirrored who she was as a charter school leader, as an empowered African American woman devoted to students of color:

> There were two Blacks in the whole group of 24 people doing the training, two of us were Black. I almost quit out of that training because the Montessori elementary history curriculum has a lot of growing that needs to happen.

She continued with a longer explanation about the timeline:

> We used the timelines to help children get a sense of history. There's a timeline of human beings one and there's a timeline of human beings two. The first timeline of human beings goes more into the Paleolithic pre-historic, that age. The timeline, you have to buy it from the institute, right. The images are already printed on it and then we had to color in the images and then color in the bands of time according to a chart that they had already premade. All the images of the people were Caucasian images, the features were Caucasian. Their response to our question as to why everyone's look Caucasian, oh, you can just color in the skin darker. The second timeline of human beings is a little more ... Just around the time of the Romans and just before that. They have this huge picture, one of the first things they have is this huge picture of this White dude, some horses,

> then there's a White dude fishing, then there's a woman sewing animal skins or something. Under the horses, it's telling the story about these people somewhere in France who, in order to get the meat, would run the horses off a cliff onto some stakes, right. This big picture here, big picture here, big picture here, some other pictures, all European images. Stonehenge is on there, I had to color that in. Then right at the bottom, it's just a mention of ... One word, great pyramid built in whatever year.

It was important that the children learned about people of color as it relates to the historical context of the United States. She emphasized that learning about this aspect of our history brings about a cultural awareness, "an awareness that there are other cultures that are co-existing and finding ways to navigate through all of them, because you go different places and you're in different situations and you meet different people; being able to still be yourself and function." This became her purpose as a Montessori educator and she noted the level of consciousness of people she encountered in the future. Witnessing Black people in power who had a significant part in the country's history urged Purple Pauline to see the importance of teaching Black and Brown children of their ancestor's involvement in human evolution. When the director of her Montessori training program informed her to accept the timeline as is, Purple Pauline felt even more obliged to teach her students of color, the full history of human evolution. Her students were her reflection; implementing a time line of human evolution showing people of color would in turn strengthen their confidence, self-esteem and self-

perception. It made her persevere and not be affected by the people who did not share the same philosophy or consciousness. When a parent pulled their child out of her classroom because an activity focused on people of color, she was not perturbed or distracted. In fact, this motivated her even more to stay true to her mission and goal of being a culturally relevant Montessori educator.

Breaking bread but not breaking shackles. The examination of Purple Pauline's data illuminated the theme, breaking bread but Not breaking shackles. While she provided formal workshops and/or frameworks, these professional development sessions were not consistent throughout the school year. I thought about the difference in her teaching staff and students if these sessions were offered on a consistent basis:

> There's an organization here in DC called Teaching for Change, and they work with helping people develop cultural competence, tolerance. We had, as part of our teacher training, a three-day workshop that all the teachers, all the staff, did. That helped prepare us. Teaching for Change was very interactive. They had things that we did, and we wrote stuff in sharpie and put it up on the wall, and we reviewed it throughout the two days. When we did the weaving, that was one day, so we kind of watched him demonstrate first and we sort of practiced, and he guided everybody through it. We had evaluations at the end, and just a real quick questionnaire that people would fill out, kind of answering what their thoughts were, how do they think it went, would they want to do that again, stuff like that. We did a little quick evaluation. We would also attend an annual Montessori conference.

A three-day workshop and a yearly conference is not sufficient time for real change to occur. It is simply a time to "break bread" for three days with one's colleagues. An interactive workshop, writing things on a paper taped to a wall does not differentiate instruction, provide one-on-one coaching, change attitudes of teachers who hold deficit perspectives or change classroom management skills. The students continue to be on the receiving end of these perspectives, "wearing" shackles in a setting meant to educate and transform.

Purple Pauline reflected on a change in the topic of professional development sessions if she were currently principal of the charter school she served:

> "I think I would probably, again, because I'm sort of evolving my whole Montessori perspective, for me the focus is on the adults really getting Montessori, and so trying to find ways to show how universal Montessori is. Some practices that black folks do, they're already sort of part of the scope of Montessori, and some of them are not. Trying to find similarities I think, and sort of highlight those, as sort of a natural flow into Montessori, and more Montessori. Not only for the staff, but also for parents, trying to help parents see how they can sort of do Montessori at home without it being something outside of the norm for them. There's some sort of natural instinctive things that we do as parents that are totally Montessori. Just trying to highlight those, and then sort of use that as the bridge to expand their awareness.

A Montessori education for students of color is quite promising and given it is dominated by White educators, Purple Pauline expressed that she trained her staff as Montessori assistants in order to provide this type of education to her students. As a recipient of Montessori school, I remember asking a question in my Master's program and my professor inquiring about whether or not I attended Montessori school. I indicated that in fact I did attend and he noted that he could tell by the question I asked. The education I received starting from a very young age, helped me navigate and be quite successful as a student and working professional, breaking free of my shackles. This is the type of education Purple Pauline wanted to provide students of color in her school. She wanted to make sure her teachers were culturally competent, but this could not occur in a short amount of time and in the absence of formal workshops or frameworks provided on a consistent basis. It was her hope the students in her school broke free of their shackles and the times she and her staff did break bread had a lasting effect.

Shattering oppression. Purple Outfit's data unveiled the theme shattering oppression. The ability to work with teachers who were both culturally competent and those who needed support is an issue principals face on a daily basis. In both instances, they are in a position to shatter the oppression students of color experience when interacting with their teachers. When asked if she could highlight a teacher who was culturally competent and a teacher who struggled with this skill, she shared two particular experiences. I thought about how many children enter their school each day interacting and conversing with teachers, only to encounter deficit perspectives. These

experiences demoralize children of color and potentially impact their academic achievement as well as socio-emotional development. She recalled:

> I have one person in particular in mind. I think it made a difference that she was a parent. To me, what I really appreciated, how she interacted with the children. It was very balanced. Her interactions with the children were very balanced. Then I had an assistant who was black, who was more on the ... To me, she was more on the ... I chalked it up to her lack of Montessori training awareness and newness to the whole concept of how discipline is applied in the Montessori context. The whole idea of giving the child the tools to develop that self-discipline. Trying to find, for each person, how to help them get to that point where they are being respectful and considerate of the child's needs, but also able to maintain the discipline or whatever it was that they needed to have in order for the classroom to function.

The teacher whose interactions with the children that were balanced modeled the appropriate Montessori method, lending itself to the nurturing of a Montessori educated student. When one of her teachers felt the need to discipline in a non-Montessori fashion, she was willing to work with her, but remained cognizant of how the teacher's perspective needed to change so that her students did not feel oppressed. Purple Pauline had the power to shatter oppression, the power to change the trajectory of a Black and Brown child's life by simply creating a healthy school environment. She ended her

interview with a reflection of her personal philosophy of Montessori and cultural competence:

> For me, I guess the idea of cultural competence or culture is sort of expanding and getting wider, in terms of ... I really look at Montessori as an avenue for spiritual advancement. Being able to provide that framework from birth for an individual soul is tremendous, it is phenomenal and I feel that the culture of the soul is what needs to be cultivated. I believe in reincarnation, I believe in karma, so the soul has had many different bodies. Each body, each experience, is an opportunity for the soul to learn, put it simply, how to behave, right. I'm a soul in a black body now and so the experiences that I have, some of them are to teach me what it feels like to be in a black body. Also, to give me the opportunity to do something from this black body that would be beneficial, right. I come back again in a Chinese body, I don't know, or in a male body or whatever. I've had those experiences, the memory is there, so my goal has been not to make any more negative. I don't want to be making any negative energy, I want to always be moving forward and up that cycle. I look at Montessori as one way that a soul from birth can have an opportunity to be in an environment that is as conducive as possible to that development of the spirit. Maria Montessori's whole goal was for the ... By the time the child became an adult, she likes to say the child is the father of the man, when the child becomes the man, because of having been approached by the adult in that particular way and having those certain experiences in the prepared environment of the classroom and the prepared

> environment of the home, to develop to that level of consciousness of the mind and the heart really. They're this new kind of person that we have yet to see. I look at Montessori, it's been around for 100 years and it's still very intellectual. Our whole culture and society values the intellect more than it does the heart.

It was such a moving reflection, reminiscent of Montessori in my upbringing. I could not help but wonder what the world would be, if children and teachers were provided this kind of education and training. Could it be possible for all oppression to be shattered?

Amtrak Archie

Amtrak Archie's Background

Amtrak Archie was born in the South Bronx, New York to an African American dad and Puerto Rican mom. His father went to prison when he was two years old and his mother was murdered when he was six years old. Ultimately his strict grandmother, "affectionately known as Grandma," raised him into adulthood. The message growing up about education was that "it was going to play the role of making many opportunities available to me." I knew:

> She didn't play any games with us about education. If we didn't do what we were supposed to, we got punished. I mean I still remember in fourth grade, my teacher called and said I was talking more than I needed to. The whole summer I was punished. I mean, sitting in your living room looking out the window watching all your friends play. My grandmother loved me to death and I know

that. I know that it hurt her to keep me on punishment, but I think it just made a lasting impression on the seriousness of what education means. She was not going to play any games with us about that.

Amtrak Archie has a younger sister. They both attended public school together through the high school level. He attended Morrisville State College, which is a two-year agricultural college in upstate New York and received his associate's degree. He subsequently transferred to SUNY Albany. At SUNY Albany, he received his bachelor's degree in sociology and a master's degree in education administration and policy studies.

During his time as an undergraduate, Amtrak Archie worked at Circuit City, an electronics store. At this point he lacked a clear career direction, "When I finished my master's program, because I knew I wanted to go into education, but I was assuming I would go into higher education." He had the opportunity to deliver some televisions to an elementary school. After getting the signature from the business manager of the school, he told them he just completed his degree in sociology and would love to volunteer some hours working with children. The principal then asked if he would like to work as a teaching assistant and he began his career in education. As a teaching assistant, he was in several classrooms during his first year, but ended up in the reading teacher's classroom as that teacher resigned during the year. At the end of the year, the principal did not find a replacement for the reading teacher, however the students performed really well on the school's internal benchmark assessments. "He asked me to

come back as the full-time teacher and I ended up teaching for four years; second grade, third grade, and fourth grade reading got looped with my boys each year."

Amtrak Archie then finished up a second master's degree in special education in literacy. When he started the program, it was a two-year requirement to study and the principal asked "me to delay my studies because it was a testing year and that is a big deal in the charter world." He decided to delay his studies for four years and the boys in the school were in the highest performing class in the entire city. He finished his program and took a part-time role at the school as a part-time administrative, support role and the school was approved for its own building. "I was asked to be the founding principal of the boys' school when the building was completed and served as the principal for about six years."

Amtrak Archie's Interview

I arranged the interview with Amtrak Archie at a meeting place that rented conference rooms. Upon arrival, one of the young employees led me outside and in a neighboring door upstairs. I sent Amtrak instructing him to text me upon his arrival so that I could let him in the door. As soon as he let me know he was downstairs, the heavens opened up and all we could hear was lightning and thunder. Amtrak Archie was dressed in tan cargo pants, a black polo shirt, a black baseball cap and was holding a black sweatshirt. He appeared very young, but I assumed he was in his mid-forties. We went up to the conference room and sat down at a large oval shaped, wooden table. I was already set up with my computer and recording app, so we had a brief conversation about his commute and began the interview.

Mirrors reflect Black gems. The theme, mirrors reflect Black gems, materialized as I listened to Amtrak Archie's experience. Amtrak Archie is a Black Gem and he saw it his responsibility to create students in his reflection, to become young, confident, and productive Black men. It became his responsibility to nurture young Black boys, teaching them the best ways to self-advocate should they ever have similar experiences like his. Amtrak Archie illustrated his cultural competence identity and the way in which he led his professional life through a memory he shared about his arrival to his undergraduate university. Enraged and hopeful at the same time, I was reminded of the concept of racial battle fatigue by Smith (2004), which refers to the psychophysiological symptoms resulting from living in mundane extreme racist environments. The stress of the constant and omnipresent front-line racial battles that people of color face in historically White spaces can become mentally, emotionally, and physically draining and/or lethal from the accumulation of physiological symptoms that oftentimes go untreated, unnoticed, or misdiagnosed (Smith, Danley, & Allen, 2007).

He recounted a story on his way to Morrisville College:

> I mean, I think the most memorable moment was when I made it up to Morrisville. My family we didn't have, there was no one in my family who had a car, but I had a really close friend who lived in the next building over from me, and he actually drove me to Morrisville and he was actually borrowing his brother's car. We didn't have any flexibility and when we left, so I actually went up a day early. I didn't know anybody. There was nobody. I was first to go away to go to college and stuff. When I get there the resident director, he essentially

said like, you don't look like me and like I don't understand why you're here a day early. But I knew that there were other kids there because there were other kids from the neighborhood that had gone. Essentially, I mean, he basically in not so many words said, "You know, you don't have um the privilege, or you know ... I'm trying to choose my words carefully. I mean, but he essentially was saying like, "You don't look like us. You don't look like you're from here. Like I can't even understand why you would even think that it was appropriate to be here. I'm sitting next to some other kids who are there that are there early.

Amtrak Archie reconciled that this experience opened his eyes to the way some White people viewed him:

I'm here early and if it requires me to pay something, let me know, but don't sit here and denigrate me for being here early and thinking like I'm trying to get over. Then he said something like, "You know, you think you can just show up. Like we don't do things for free here and ... " Essentially saying I'm trying to come get stuff for free. I think for me that was the, I think that was the first experience that I had where I said that people could get treated differently based on the way that they look or the way that people perceive where they come from. I mean, growing up in the South Bronx I didn't have many interactions with folks who didn't look like me.

The experience compelled Amtrak Archie to have his teaching staff become aware of some of their biases and perceptions that they brought to their classrooms. As an all boys' school, he emphasized working with White female staff and taught them how to best build relationships with the boys, "I think I learned how to just be better about training teachers, so that they can best build relationships and not just relationships for the sake of getting boys to listen, but meaningful relationships where they learn to embrace the boys for who they were and then the boys equally can embrace the teachers and in many cases, those teacher's families for who they were as well." It was important to teach the boys in his school how to self-advocate so that even if others have a perception of them similar to what he experienced at Morrisville College, they were prepared for the encounter. Self-advocacy, as Amtrak viewed it, can only be taught if healthy meaningful relationships exist. Black gems invest in their students and given he saw himself in his students, the commitment and devotion was that much stronger.

Breaking bread but not breaking shackles. Amtrak Archie acknowledged he attempted to organize professional development sessions in a way that made sense. I was intrigued when he acknowledged that professional development sessions need to be suitable to the teaching staff and student population. While he included relevant topics, the sessions did not reference any formal frameworks or workshops. It became quite clear he recognized the need to address pressing issues at his school impacting his students and staff, but "breaking bread" does not always mean all staff members through professional development are breaking shackles students of color "wear" in their

schools. Often times, professional development sessions are a one-size-fits-all model with teachers walking way continuing to perpetuate deficit thinking:

> I think the most meaningful professional development session that we did that really connected folks and invested them in why we were doing what we were doing was this session we did every year that, essentially, was titled, "The Male Literacy Crisis" and what our roles and responsibilities were to combat it and eliminate it. I mean, it was essentially a session that was comprised of research that pointed to all the data that says that boys enter and move through school, they lag behind their female counterparts in their literacy, language, vocabulary development. That is one of the indicator or metrics that accounts for why we see disproportionate dropout rates and performance rates among African-American and Latino males because our population's 98% American-Latino. It just required us to do things differently. What it meant was it actually required a ton more than what you would expect from the normal teacher. We actually had our teachers start the year three weeks before every other teacher in the neighboring district because for our kindergartners we actually used to do kind of a summer long kindergarten preparation program. In terms of how we ran the session, the session essentially started with a common reading. We read research articles on the male literacy crisis, or essentially how boys develop in their literacy, language, and vocabulary development. have an opportunity to read the literature, and then we have them mark and annotate the literature. An example would be, you know, "Mark with an E a place where you had an emotional

response to what you've read," or "Mark with a C a space where you're confused about what the research says compared to the experience that you've had." Then they have an opportunity to share their analysis with their peers and colleagues, and then what we do is, we always engage in practice. I can remember one of the practice activities was, is that they were sitting with a parent who had questions about why we have structured our literacy program in the way that we have, and part of their responsibility was to incorporate and infuse what the research says about boys and their literacy, language, vocabulary development, and what it means for us and how we structure our literacy blocks throughout the day.

I got a grant from the Jordan Foundation, it's like $2500 where we would purchase these kindergarten prep kits where we would have, scholars would have number lines and alphabet charts and novels. They would have access to all these things that could get them prepared for kindergarten. Families would read books to them and we would have a way that teachers would track the engagement of families, but it required our teachers to just, I think, work much harder than I think their peers in other neighboring districts were. I think what it meant for folks is if you were truly invested in combating this male literacy crisis and putting our scholars on the pass to success and opportunity, it's going to require you to work much harder than other folks.

Amtrak Archie continued with an explanation about the involvement of teachers in his Male Literacy Crisis initiative as well as sessions regarding discipline:

> I think beyond that, we were very deliberate about teaching our teachers how to teach reading equality. We were very deliberate about teaching behavior management in a way that really communicated to the scholars that we value them, we embrace them and we want to pull them closer in their families. That consisted of the teachers developing non-invasive techniques for getting scholars who were off-task back on task and things like that. We also had what I call the decision room, which was ... I mean, one of the things I did tell my teachers and families was, I would never put teachers in a position where they could not teach. If a scholar was truly disrupting the learning environment I was never going to force a teacher to teach. We would have a process in place that if you exhausted your classroom management tools and there was evidence that you were effective in doing them, we had this place called the Decision Room where we would have our scholars come. We would reflect on their behaviors. We would try to get them to connect their emotions to some of the choices that they would associate with those emotions. We would take them to role plays, so that they could access replacement behaviors because one of the things that we learned is some our kindergartners especially, this is the first time that they heard the word No.

Amtrak Archie acknowledged he taught teachers to manage behaviors through professional development interactions, but again, none of these interactions were rooted in a formal framework or workshop. He also noted the professional development sessions about the male literacy crisis had elements of cultural competence, but he did

not deliberately connect this for his staff. They came together to "break bread", but the cultural competence piece played such a major role in reference to interactions of his staff with his student body, at times the shackles persisted. Students learned to become strong readers, but there were teachers who still did not know how to interact healthily with Black and Brown boys as well as their families. Despite developing professional development centered around the male literacy crisis, Amtrak Archie did not reference any formal framework or workshop targeting cultural competence.

Shattering oppression. A principal is in the position to effect great change in their schools, informing teachers about the very culture in which they teach. The theme, shattering oppression, embodied Amtrak Archie's experiences with teachers who were culturally competent and those who struggled with this area. He highlighted teachers whose deficit thinking impacted their relationships with students and families:

> I think that those were teachers who we saw have difficulty managing, establishing, maintaining firm relationships with families. I think those were teachers who made assumptions about families. Made assumptions like families weren't invested in their child's education and made assumptions like, the child didn't have a place to do homework at home, made assumptions like dad wasn't around or involved or invested in it. I think they also, some of them had poor relationships with kids because they assumed that when boys would ask questions or kind of push back when they got consequences or were asked to do things, they only saw it as defiance and didn't see what I was like, we can

actually help this scholar learn how to advocate for themselves and we felt really productive.

Probably advocate for other people as well. I think some of the other teachers who struggle with cultural competence. I mean, I think it manifests itself in them not really taking an initiative to just learn more about the scholars and families that they serve. I think that part of that had to do with me and not making some of those things available to them as a part of our professional development. I think individuals have a responsibility who've chosen to work in a particular community and serving a particular group of scholars and families need to know who you're serving.

Based on these interactions, it helped him determine future professional development sessions targeting the impact on scholars and families. When one of his teachers told a student to "hurry completing their work because she had a baby to go home to," Amtrak Archie explained the significance of her impudent statement. The student's parents requested a meeting with the teacher and Amtrak Archie. The incident reiterated the need for strong professional development sessions targeting cultural competence and ways in which teachers learned to become effective communicators with their families. As a result, he carefully and constructively created sessions to shatter oppression, helping teachers learn effective communication skills with parents and students.

Amtrak Archie drew attention to one particular teacher who possessed strong cultural competence in his school. She shattered oppression through her actions, relationships with scholars, and connection with families:

> I mean, one teacher, she spent a ton of time in the community, more than, probably more than me as well. I mean and she was in the community doing things at the local church. She was doing walks with local organizations around gun violence. I just think she was really invested in being a part of the fabric of the community. Her and a couple of others, but I just know for her she was about it in ways that I think just other people weren't. I mean, she got phenomenal results with the kids. I mean, she still has families who bake for her on holidays and things like that. One of the other things that she did was a part of parent-teacher night. We did Parent-Teacher Night a little different. We spent the first half an hour just informing families, each individual classroom, about just all the things that scholars were doing. Scholars would produce a classroom video for their families, where they would basically talk them through what they did throughout the day. They would be engaged in like a Turn and Talk and then we would pause and capture a video and say like, "Mom, so but this call is a Turn and Talk and this is this where we actually talk to ... " Families love seeing their kids. This teacher would always take it a step further. As a part of the Parent-Teacher Night she would have the families create a video that she would then show to the boys. The family would basically talk through why they were important, talk through some of the sacrifices that they would continue to make

so that they could have a wonderful experience for school and throughout life and stuff like that. I just thought, I mean, I don't know that I kind of naturally saw it as her trying to be culturally competent, but I think it was. I think it was her honoring the identities and the value that families bring to this work that we do. I mean, thinking back on it now, I think she was definitely someone who's really engaged in cultural competency in ways that many of us weren't. I don't know that she even knew what she was doing really, but I just thought that she was invested in the families and the community in ways that other folks just hadn't learned how to do.

Amtrak Archie felt this teacher's strong cultural competence skills helped her develop meaningful relationships with her boys and parents in her class. She was able to shatter oppression and provide the boys in her class with a positive educational experience, inadvertently preparing them for their future as educated, competent young men.

Caci Commute

Caci Commute's Background

Caci Commute's mother is an immigrant from Guyana and is the youngest of five children. "So I guess you would call me first-generation American, along with some of my other siblings; me and my sister graduated college at the same time." It was of great importance in her family to progress in education and she was the only one to graduate with a master's degree. She is the principal of a middle school and has been

there for four years. She completed a leadership fellowship for those interested in going into the charter school system. Prior to starting at the charter school, she was a teacher for 15 years.

Caci Commute started in education because of what she was seeing around her growing up:

> When I was growing up, particularly in high school with the large number of teen pregnancy issues that existed, and then thought about where it came from. It came from homes where there was some supervision that was lacking, or just lack of support that often comes with poverty.

She reflected on the school system not having a level of support that affected students' social and emotional being, and wanted to be able to change the statistics around that. Caci Commute acknowledged that she "never actually wanted to be an educator."

In her household growing up, education was never really talked about as her mother would say, "You just needed to go to school and get good grades." Her mother did not know much about college and Caci Commute was not aware of the level of education her mother completed. "When she came to the United States, she just took whatever job she could get and she did training for vocational school." Caci Commute also acknowledged that she didn't always get good grades and it was a battle for her once she got to college, but once there she pushed through because it was something she wanted to achieve.

Caci Commute's Interview

The school's Executive Director arranged the interview with Caci Commute and explained to the principal that the meeting would take 15 minutes. Upon our meeting at a conference space, I expressed that the interview would be between 60-90 minutes. Her expression of disappointment led me to believe that she was not happy about giving up that much time. I thanked her for the time she could give me and reassured her about how helpful her responses would be to the work of African American charter school principals. She was dressed in jeans and a short sleeve t-shirt with white and red converse sneakers on; her hair was straight and just about mid-neck length. I set up my recording app and computer quickly so that we could begin.

Mirrors reflect Black gems. My analysis of Caci Commute's data revealed the theme, mirrors reflect Black gems. Growing up in an urban metropolis, she was struck by the high rate of teen pregnancies as well as the lack of support for students of color in urban schools. After completing her degrees and a fellowship for charter school leadership, she made it her mission to change statistics regarding the same areas she witnessed growing up. Her commitment to educating Black and Brown babies was admirable and as I listened to her recount an experience she had as a college student, it was clear she was the mirror of her students. She was the Black gem whose students reflected her as they navigated living in an urban environment. They too were going to enter a world where they may feel inferior when they finally engage with others outside of their community. It was her responsibility to provide her students with the knowledge and skills to handle similar experiences in their future. This experience influenced her

cultural competence identity and professional life compelling her to remain steadfast in the daily challenges of educating students in an urban environment:

> I don't really remember. I don't think that it was as young. Because I lived around black people for the majority of my life, probably started to become more exposed to it after high school into college, where now I'm going to classes with white people, where I'm working with white people. But even still with the jobs, many of them I still worked mostly with people of color. And so, I would say it was probably in college where I experienced, or started to realize ... I think I had an understanding that I was different from other races, but I didn't feel it or wasn't affected by it until college. And I think for me, it wasn't anything direct. At least I didn't notice anything direct. I just noticed that I felt inferior, and it was more so about knowledge and the fact that I felt like all these people are so much smarter than me. And I started to view it as a race thing. initially it was scary. It was like this feeling of, feeling inferior makes you feel like everybody else is better than you and you're not good enough, so you don't really fit. At first, it left me feeling like, okay, I'm not going to assert myself more, or I'm not going to put any spotlights on me, so I'm not going to participate as openly because I don't want to look stupid. But eventually, the more I started to interact with people of other races, they embraced me in such a way where I felt comfortable enough to open myself to say, "I don't know," or I could ask questions, or to learn from them. But the way that they ... And I don't know that it was anything intentional. But the way that that feeling of being embraced came about was recognizing, oh,

> they don't know everything. They're not all that smarter than me. And so, once I started to come to that understanding and realize that, well, yes, as white people, they've had some opportunities and some advantages that I did not. And so, while many of them do know more, all of them didn't. So I recognized that, oh, I do have something to offer.

Caci Commute used this experience to make sure her students, who grow up mainly around people of color, did not experience this feeling of inferiority. Caci Commute also emphasized her teachers having meaningful relationships with students:

> And then I definitely push teachers to work on those relationships with students, so that they can understand them. I don't necessarily tell them to point out a race thing, but the more they know about you ... They're still looking at you as a white person or Asian person or an Indian person. So they're seeing that, Oh, we're not that different in this respect. We do have some things in common.

Black gems center their work on the well-being of their Black and Brown students, especially as it relates to preparing them for the negative perspectives others may have. Ensuring her students learned to read and write is only part of the education Caci Commute wished to provide.

Breaking bread but not breaking shackles. My analysis of Caci Commute's data unfolded the theme, breaking bread but Not breaking shackles. She acknowledged if she were to plan ahead, there would be meaningful professional development sessions

about cultural competence. The sessions she did speak of brought her teaching staff together, but this did not always eradicate deficit perspectives. Without meaningful professional development sessions about cultural competence, students on the receiving end of deficit perspectives continue "wearing" shackles when interacting with teachers who see them as inferior. It highlighted the lack of emphasis on cultural competence in leadership preparation programs. I thought about what a disservice it is to attend a leadership program, especially one that targets charter school leaders, and not receiving adequate training in this area.

Caci Commute shared a cultural competence professional development session she incorporated in the past:

> But I tried to incorporate a professional development session around culture. Mainly because we have a lot of teachers, we have white teachers, we may have some teachers who are of other races, but very few of them. I believe that many of them come in with these stereotypes and with this idea that, like you mentioned, "Oh, all black parents beat their kids." Or, just these things that are just not okay, as well as their way of thinking about how black kids learn and they have all these disabilities and all this stuff. What I tried to do is, this year we are doing that again. But first of all, making sure that the teachers know the community. So they know the demographic that we're dealing with, the percentage of low income homes, those types of things. But in previous years, I would also go as far as, "Let's talk about race." And one year, it was really, really

good where people really started to open up, and identify, we even had some white people identifying as black people.

Caci Commute continued with an explanation of what occurred during this session and the overall purpose:

> Because of the way that they were brought up, or the culture that they are more inclined to associate with. We only had one teacher in that group who opted to not get too involved in the discussion. And I was like, "Okay. That's okay." She still was able to observe it and participate in parts where she felt comfortable to do so, but it led to very open conversations. We read the book Teaching Other People's Children by Lisa Delpit. Yeah, and so I kind of got that idea just from reading that book, just the whole idea that we are teaching other people's children, but it's not really always about black and white. So we do need to understand how they learn, we do need to understand the homes that they're coming from, we do need to know that it's not necessarily all as bad as it may seem. Yes we live in a neighborhood where the poverty level is really, really high. But, not all of our students come from this neighborhood. We have people that are coming from outside. But even though they may be in the neighborhood and be in poverty, we still have working families. We still have families, parents of children who have both mother and father at home. Not in every household is just mom raising 10 children, right? So making them aware of that fact, that we can't respond to kinds based on what we hear in the media. We have to recognize

that they all have different situations, and we have to be open to learning that. And we can't give discipline, we cannot do that in such a way where we're biased. Like oh, we feel like the only way that these black kids are gonna listen is if I raise my voice. Or again, like you mentioned, if I call home, it won't make a difference, the behavior won't change, or a parent won't be anything about it, or the kid is gonna get a beating. We can't go in like that. And so I've tried to do that, and then that's probably the one thing that I've done with staff, but it's usually at the beginning of the year, I haven't done a whole lot more with staff in this school year. But with students, we try to do black history month, Hispanic heritage month, women's month, we try to do those types of things to build awareness around that. But I definitely can say that it's not enough. Once we had a multicultural potluck, I think we did it twice actually, where the kids ... No we did this actually three times. The potluck was once, but the "dress in your cultural gear," we did that about three times, so that they can come in and they dress up how they would dress in their culture. And so it was really nice to see them. And for some of them it was like, "Oh I love that outfit! Can I get one?" It was really nice, and also making them feel proud of their culture, just as you kind of acknowledged, the things that they come in with. So again, I don't think that we do enough of it. But we definitely do try to do some things around the various cultures that exist here.

While Caci Commute was able to bring her staff together to “break bread,” it was clear some of her teacher exhibited deficit thinking, thus warranting the session in the first place. The professional development session attempted to break the shackles the students “wore” when they entered the school and worked with staff who held strong deficit views. She did not reference any formal professional development framework or workshop targeting cultural competence. A consistent formal framework or workshop could help Caci Commute implement meaningful cultural competence sessions for her staff. Unfortunately, this participant was not available for a follow up interview to ask further questions about professional development sessions in her school.

Shattering oppression. Caci Commute demonstrated a commitment to the students she served in her school. I was struck by her keen awareness of her personal and professional circumstances as well as her strong desire to create an educational environment where students of color had positive experiences with teaching staff. She highlighted a teacher who made a conscious effort to shatter oppression as well as a teacher who struggled in this area:

> Okay I guess I'll use this one teacher who's our only teacher on staff who is Indian. And young, very open, but you can definitely ... She'll tell you, "I always thought-" ... She would bring to us, there was a kid who she was like, "He's touching me, he's touching me. He's either huggy-feely or he tries to touch my breasts." And I'm like, that's really strange 'cause I don't see this child as doing this to be harmful, right? And it was a Spanish kid, right? So I was like, "Have you even contacted his mother to find out is he like this with her at home?" And

> I've had different instances where I've had to direct her like that, so she can open up and understand it better. And eventually, she would come to the understanding that oh this is why he does this. Now I know he's not doing it to be mean, but this is how he is with his mother, so he probably sees me motherly. And I don't know if that's necessarily culturally, but it helped her. She learned how to do that and all kinds of other moves and things like that because she then started to open up to the kids, to know their way. And so with her, it was more like, "Have you considered this? Have you reached out and talked to the parent to see about this?" So getting her to find ways to learn more about why something is happening, as opposed to just making this assumption that this person is doing it to be just disgusting, or doing the wrong thing intentionally. But it's helped her to really just find ways to learn, to understand better.

The teacher Caci Commute described required coaching to understand the student's actions were culturally relevant. Without this coaching, it was possible the teacher would want to suspend the student because she deemed the behavior inappropriate. Caci Commute was not able to highlight a teacher who had strong cultural competence skills. The teacher had a keen awareness of her own culture, but not necessarily of others:

> No, I don't think so. It's weird, because when you said that at first, I thought you were gonna say "was really strong but then they realized-" Because I had one teacher who came in like very Afro-centric, she felt like she knew things. But it

was more just about her own culture. And not to say that she was closed off to other cultures, she just had this demeanor like, "I am culturally aware," but it was more so just about her own culture." And so that's probably the one that came to mind, because I'm thinking of her as having a lot of knowledge and being culturally competent within her own group, but not so much about others. So I have not had anyone on staff who I felt was ... I mean I guess some people have more cultural competence than others, I'll say that.

Although quite conscious of the need to shatter oppression, there was a disconnect with her staff as it related to cultural competence. She made it a point to hire a diverse staff:

So I definitely try to create some level of diversity. I got a little bit too carried away with trying to make sure I had more African-American staff members, and now trying to get back some more of our Caucasian teachers, because it's like, Ugh. Sometimes that's a little bit too much, that's what they see every day all day. They need more diversity so they can actually l learn from it as well.

Hiring a diverse staff addressed ways to shatter oppression that could occur within her classrooms. Given there was not a follow-up interview, I was not able to ask Caci Commute additional questions regarding staff members who demonstrated acts of cultural competence in their classrooms or with families. A second interview would

help to probe further in my investigation about specific ways professional development sessions were run as well as outcomes.

Gayle Grad

Gayle Grad's Background

Gayle Grad identifies as a 44-year-old African American woman of Jamaican and Bahamian descent. She is the youngest child and youngest grandchild as well as the product of a range of different academic experiences, which later served to inform her as a leader and educator. Gayle Grad started in Catholic school for grades one through four and then went to a gifted-talented middle school specializing in the arts, which she believed gave her an accelerated edge. She went to an independent high school and was part of the A Better Chance Program; "my mother wouldn't let me go to boarding school, so they found me." Gayle Grad received two master's degrees, one from Duke University and the other at New York University in principal training.

She reported that her mother and stepdad were the head of the family, but grew up across the hall from her aunt and across the street from her grandmother who was the matriarch for the better part of her existence. Gayle Grad received two different messages regarding school when she was growing up. Her mother was apparently always sickly and was in and out of school; she was never really excited about school. "I think for her, my mother's very gregarious, very creative in many different ways, but not confident when it comes to school or things of that nature." Gayle Grad's grandmother, however, grew up in 1923 during the Great Depression. She would tell stories about being a 4'11 African American woman, being bright and smart, but not

being able to walk in front of her high school graduating class because they couldn't have anybody Black at the front of the line. "This idea of being a brown-skinned Black woman in the forties and wanting to go to college, not being able to go to college despite living three blocks from City College. She couldn't go to college, but her friends who were lighter or affluent were able to go to school."

Her grandmother worked, but education was always important to her, drilling it and impressed it upon Gayle Grad. Gayle Grad's grandmother retired and volunteered in the preschool she attended. While there, she did many things around the classroom, learning alongside her siblings and understood that there was "never any ceiling for her." Her grandmother went back to college around 60 or 65, became a tax prepare. She was a lifelong learner who "embodied the importance of education;" all of her grandchildren are college graduates. "I think just not even attention, but I think those two things have always sat with me, just in terms of how important it was to be connected and committed to education."

Gayle Grad's Interview

The interview with Gayle Grad took place at a public meeting space that included conference rooms. I arrive early and proceed up the stairs to a sitting area to wait for Gayle Grad. Upon her arrival, Gayle Grad is dressed in a red short-sleeve dress with black shoes and carrying a bag pack that appeared to be quite heavy. I immediately notice her dreadlocks and wonder if she is of Caribbean descent. We shake hands and exchange pleasantries, finally able to put a name with a face and head to an empty conference room. Gayle Grad sits at the head of the table, takes a deep breath, indicating

that she is ready to start the interview. I set up my recording app and my laptop to take notes while she responds to my questions.

Mirrors reflect Black gems. Gayle Grad's data unveiled the theme, mirrors reflect Black gems. As she shared her experience of being reminded she was part of an oppressed group, I learned of her extreme consciousness about her commitment and responsibility as an African American charter school leader. She saw her students in her reflection, fiercely protecting yet preparing them for overt and covert forms of racism they will experience in life. I could not help but feel grateful for meeting someone with such a strong commitment to students of color, a Black Gem devoted to students who look like her in a world that does not see the color brown in a positive light.

Gayle Grad made meaning of her cultural competence identity by referring to a memory she experienced during her undergraduate tenure:

> It wasn't like they want to talk to you because you're black, or they don't want to talk to you because you're black. In that space, I just kind of thought about people being different in different spaces, but it wasn't a challenge. When I went to undergrad, I think being in the engineering school, and it wasn't being at Duke, but it was being in the engineering school. I think being a black woman in the engineering school, and some of the experiences, seeking help from professors, going to advisors in that space, I remember someone making a comment to me about obviously we're not good at math. I internalized that as, I think at that point I was probably 18, so it was probably my second year. I internalized that, Maybe I'm not. I started thinking about all these things, despite 18 years to the contrary.

> Not taking math with the advanced kids at the independent school for the people who pay in my freshman year, because I was two years ahead, very advanced kids. Still graduating, taking AP calculus. To get to Duke and placing out of freshman calculus, but to be at the higher level of, I can't remember which math it was. It was probably differential equations, and I was struggling with this class, struggling with a couple of other things for reasons that I understand now. That comment just kind of sat with me, I thought about it and I thought, Maybe I'm not good, maybe I'm not good enough, and never really kind of putting race into perspective until probably sometime later.

As overt as this experience was for Gayle Grad, this compelled her to make sure her students understood racism embedded within structures and systems:

> I love being black. I think that we are a dynamic people, a creative people, a resilient people. I think we are very diverse people. We look diverse, we think in diverse ways. I think there's a full spectrum and a full gamut of richness that we bring, kind of both culturally and creatively. Personally, not to say that other people don't, but I just love black people. I think I feel motivated and charged to think about the legacy of what happens next, for the kids that come behind us. We stand on the shoulders of giants, but somehow our generation, this Generation X, somehow they're in this gray space. We understand what it is, but we haven't done a great job of communicating that, conveying that to the generation behind us. The charge is as they kind of come into their own on the

heels of all these things that are happening in the last probably five years, in the public eye, the charge is really helping them to see race as salient and to understand their place in the larger historical picture. Not being confused by the fact that a few people have moved into the middle and upper middle class, and now that doesn't mean that all black people have arrived. The level of systemic and endemic racism is kind of crazy, and all of the, I would say the things that are in place, we still laugh about Affirmative Action being in school. Affirmative Action got me to the door, but it didn't get me this degree. With those things being gone, and students and people living in communities that are very insular where they're almost 100% black, and you don't have very many interactions with people besides the people who sell products into your community, and you don't think about anything beyond that scope, as an urban educator I find sometimes it's hard to get them to understand that racism is not about whether or not one white person called you a nigger. It's really about the systems and structures that don't pick up the trash in your neighborhood, or there's no garbage cans on the corner. Those systems and structures, your broken chairs and your schools. Getting them to see beyond this small, low level racism, which the average person particularly in this area has figured out how to either hide it, or consider themselves to be progressive.

Gayle Grad expressed her cognizance of students being from a different background and the expectations society has for them. Her experiences remind her of the commitment she has to the students of color at her school:

> I think for me, if you don't understand that as a young black person or a young Latino person, that it's not just important to understand 2 plus 2, but understanding 2 plus 2 in a space where people lived, died, fought, in order for you just to be able to have access to this information, that it's important for us as the leaders to make sure that we do that. And so when I think about, for me, it's how do I make sure that they have access to the most education or content that's going to give them the broadest amount of options, but how they then understand this experience as it relates specifically to them.

As a result of Gayle Grad's personal experience, her heightened social consciousness and awareness is something she shared frequently with her students. As a Black gem, her students were her and could end up attending a school such as Duke University. Her mission is to ensure her students not only mirror the level of achievement she reached, but also become equally, if not more socially conscious.

Black Pride. Gayle Grad's data revealed the sub-theme, Black pride, which represented the pride in herself, her students of color, the Black race, as well as contributed to her cultural competence identity. The palpable emotion she expressed left me inspired and in awe:

> I love being black. I think that we are a dynamic people, a creative people, a resilient people. I think we are very diverse people. We look diverse, we think in diverse ways. I think there's a full spectrum and a full gamut of richness that we bring, kind of both culturally and creatively. Personally, not to say that other people don't, but I just love black people. I think I feel motivated and charged to think about the legacy of what happens next, for the kids that come behind us.

Breaking bread but not breaking shackles. Breaking bread but Not breaking shackles is a theme that emerged from Gayle Grad's data. While she was quite open about the professional development sessions offered at her school, it was clear the sessions did not always inform teachers they were responsible for providing an education that broke the shackles Black and Brown students often "wear" within in schools and thereafter. I reflected on the idea that the literature regarding education typically focuses on the teachers, but not on school leadership. If she were better prepared as a principal to implement formal frameworks or workshops targeting cultural competence, then perhaps she would not have had staff who struggled in this area. Bringing colleagues together to "break bread" serves an inadequate purpose for students of color who attend schools each day in the hopes of becoming well-educated, contributing citizens.

Gayle Grad shared information about her professional development sessions at her school:

We do a lot of literacy work, and I was really excited that we kind of launched and deepened an early college program while I was there. One of the things that was important, because post college, liberal arts college, was how do we build cultural competence into what it is, into the texts that students are looking at? People are looking for people with terminal degrees, they don't always look like us, to come in and teach. I'm like, if you're teaching writing, how are you teaching writing in a way? I had this person teaching writing, she was crazy but the kids loved her. She was always coming with these stories, it got to the point where I was kind of like, "What are you doing in the writing class that you can come with me and tell me who was abused, and who was this…, I was like, Stop having kids write victim narratives. Stop trying to press them to find their deepest darkest secrets to you. We did a whole ... some teachers created an anthology, so they spent a summer kind of going through a writing experience and so thinking about how to critically analyze text, how to read text closely, how to think about text, and a range of literacy strategies like critical reading and lit strategies. Then the teachers were able to, they decided on a theme, and using this theme they were able to then pull text, and use those texts to push students to think critically. So I would think having the teachers go through this literacy exercise and then to think about the text that I think would be relevant for students to use that would help them to push themselves to think more deeply is one thing we did.

She also mentioned the deans in the school planned the professional development sessions mainly about discipline:

> It might focus a little more on how do we address behaviors when behaviors go wrong. And not always in a punitive way, but how do we prevent it, how do we address behaviors. So some of the push in some of our, some of the ways that I strike the Dean team and then they ultimately will push that to the teachers is, how do we celebrate students when they're doing well, how do we focus, how do we spend more time looking at positive areas and positive attributes. I don't know that we ... we were not a place that spent a lot of time, I think, linking discipline to cultural practices. I think we probably spent, I think in my mind, if I had to be honest, I probably tried to work hard to disconnect discipline, or disconnect the cultural, and school culture, when I say cultural. The school culture experience for students, to disconnect that from what felt like was something that was very institutionalized. Anything that I felt was, felt like the criminal justice system, or things that I felt were effective to students and their ability to be independent thinkers, and to really be able to make choices, and to be fully functioning adults when you think about where we were preparing them to go.

Although Gayle Grad possessed strong cultural competence and social awareness, she did not reference a formal framework or workshop her charter school

implemented for her staff. After being probed more in her follow up interview, this reference also did not emerge.

Shattering oppression. The theme, shattering oppression, emerged from Gayle Grad's data bringing light to the idea that principals and teachers are in a position to shatter oppression students of color often experience in schools. Her responses to my questions about teachers who demonstrated or struggled with cultural competence were very candid and forthright. I was immediately drawn in to the way she answered her questions, commanding both my attention and reverence.

When asked to highlight a teacher who struggled with cultural competence, Gayle Grad shared an experience with a male teacher:

> This gentleman on my staff was your complexion, he was biracial. He would say, he was a brown gentleman, he would say, I don't have anything in common with these kids. Oh my goodness. You need a mirror? He gravitated towards all the white members of the team, it was very much like, "I don't understand, I can't relate, this is not my experience." He had a very, very, very hard time connecting with kids. He continued to struggle with kids, and then as you tried to talk to him about relationships and how he could connect with kids, it was very much like, But I don't really have much in common with them. Why do you want to teach? Because I'm smart, and I know English, and I can impart knowledge upon who want to get knowledge. I throw it up, sprinkle it, whoever wants to catch it, they can teach it. My predecessor, something in him, he had some other challenges. He had some hygiene issues which were a bigger barrier for the kids. Then he

would do things to antagonize the kids. As a big man, a tall man, a black man, he would antagonize the young men, he would put kids out of his classroom. The things that he would do if he looked different, I guarantee that he would have gotten a far more intense response. There was a response, but there also was a level of, "We're going to take this up until a certain point." He really struggled with that, and I think the idea, that he would say to me stuff like, I don't have anything in common with these kids.

When asked during her follow up interview about how this teacher would antagonize students in his class, Gayle Grad expressed he was impatient, combative, and made incendiary, condescending remarks. In response to these comments, the students became combative. School should serve as a safe haven, the place to receive an education and learn skills to redress deficit perspectives. It should not serve as the place to confront those who engage in a power struggle. This teacher clearly had difficulty shattering oppression and in fact perpetuated this very notion through his actions. Gayle Grad expressed that this teacher continues to work at the school and the dean provided professional development strategies addressing his areas of difficulty.

She also highlighted a teacher who demonstrated strong cultural competence skills:

Probably with my English teachers. I really didn't think of English teachers despite the fact that I keep talking about them. My science squad was super small. The English teacher, this particular English teacher who later individual of

> transitioned out of the classroom, she was very much raised in the culture of the African centric culture, African dance, very cultural family. a black woman. When it came time to test, really being able to push, the kids were reading high level texts. She ultimately became the person I pulled up to lead the English team, but this idea of how important culture was to the work that we were doing, and how important it was to the things she celebrated outside. I don't think I talked a lot about what we celebrated outside, making certain we did Black History month or Kwanzaa celebration every year, making certain that we celebrate the culture. We did cultural events, we did Black History programs that really celebrated the arts and brought some other things in. I think it was bringing different artifacts, the pride and the passion for all of her kids, really just kind of going the extra mile for them.

Gayle Grad sought to shatter oppression at her school through her work with students of color as well as through the design of appropriate professional development coaching or sessions for her staff. The teachers Gayle Grad highlighted at her school demonstrate the power of being in a position to both influence those who seek to nurture and educate children of color and those whom create oppressive learning environments. The oppressive learning environments should not replicate the outside oppressive environments that exist in our society.

Vocal Vicky

Vocal Vicky's Background

Vocal Vicky grew up in one of the wealthiest counties in Northern California and identifies as a biracial woman. While she grew up in a predominantly White community, she identifies culturally as a Black woman. Vocal Vicky was raised by a White single mother, but her brother identifies as White. She acknowledged that her K-12 experience was not very easy; "I was very, very rebellious, got into a lot of trouble." The message about education growing up was that it was important to go to school, but it wasn't an exception that she will go to college, the exception was that she needed to take care of yourself and be independent. Both of her parents believed in the myth of meritocracy, "pulling yourself up by the bootstraps and it's all going to be alright." Her parents both had humble beginnings and worked their way up into very successful careers.

The connection between her K-12 experience and her work as a Dean of Students later in a charter school was best suited for her:

> I could connect with young people and had really developed my relationship-building skills through my work at the alternative detention center. The students had a very large lack of trust in education. When I arrived to this center from teaching in Miami, I just brought the idea of valuing building relationships with children and with families and community was something that the school hadn't really dug deep into. They kind of came in and were like, we're this school, we're going to do all these great things, but they didn't dive into community.

> They didn't show up at the basketball game, or they didn't do things like that to really understand what it is about this area and what do the families love and what do the kids love and really honoring the experience of kids and the families.

As a former Teacher of the Year, Vocal Vicky expressed her natural ability to connect with students helped her in the position of Dean of Students position because she developed really strong relationships, particularly with students who were really struggling in the school community.

She was first-generation high school and college graduate, attending the University of California Berkeley where she studied sociology. She later went into Teach for America right out of college and was in the first cohort that went to Miami Dade Public School, teaching high school English for three years. She also taught in alternative schools for students transitioning out of detention centers and fell in love with the work. Vocal Vicky then decided to get a master's degree in Leadership from Columbia University and then went to teach for nine years at a charter school. She went from teaching to seventh grade literature and writing to the Dean of Students, assuming that position for three years and then becoming the principal of that school for six years.

Vocal Vicky's Interview

The interview with Vocal Vicky took place in school network headquarter conference room. When I entered the conference room, Vocal Vicky was already waiting and she stood up smiling with her hand out. She was wearing a blue and white sundress, with a beautiful brown beaded necklace. We shook hands as she expressed her

excitement about meeting me. I told her I was told such great things about her and was looking forward to our meeting as well. I took out my lap top and recording app as I set up to begin our interview. She explained she just began her doctoral studies and needed something for her first assignment; "we can help each other in our doctoral work." I pressed record and started the interview.

Mirrors reflect Black gems. Vocal Vicky reflected on her childhood, growing up as a bi-racial woman, but identifying as Black. Her memories were similar to experiences my bi-racial cousins experienced; some continuing to grapple with their identity and place in our society. I am always saddened to hear when people who are bi-racial feel the need or are forced to choose one race. It is a reminder of how much our society lacks awareness, acceptance, and tolerance. Vocal Vicky reflected on these memories to make meaning of her cultural competence identity, which influenced her professional life. Her background cultivated a Black Gem who became dedicated to students who did not always feel as if they fit in. Those students were her reflection and she later rose to a position where she influenced them as well as educators about similar incidents:

> I'm five years old, a young man that I still remember his first and last name, we're Facebook friends today, called me the n-word. And I took my lunch pail and whacked him alongside the head knowing that like ... I don't even know, I don't remember why I knew I wasn't supposed to be called that. And I walked to the principal's office and I remember my mom coming in and me just like not getting in trouble for hitting him. So, that was a very defining moment like, "Hey, there's

> something different. And then, the next moment about three years later, eight years old, the census when they used to come around door to door. And my mom and I walked to the door, and opened the door, and they asked, "Well, what is your daughter's racial identity? And at the same time, I said Black, she said White. We just kind of looked at each other. And I looked at the census man and I said, well, can you please put both because my parents are both. And the census man said, "No, I can't. You must choose. And 'til this day I don't even remember what the choice was, I just remember after he left, sitting down with my mom and her explaining that if I were to put White that it would bring certain benefits versus if I put Black on that form. But if I wanted to put Black, it's my choice and that she definitely recognizes that it's a little complicated and she wishes that the world could put both.

Vocal Vicky continued explaining she struggled growing up in a predominantly White community and recognizing by middle school she was looked at as Black. She acknowledged she did not formulate her own identity by this point in her life. These experiences continued strengthening her belief that everyone is always on a spectrum of socio-cultural consciousness. As a Black gem, Vocal Vicky used these experiences to help her staff and community increase their socio-cultural consciousness and gauge where her staff were on the spectrum, which in turn impacted her students. Her mirror never ceases to reflect students she wishes to turn into Black gems.

Breaking bread but not breaking shackles. Although Vocal Vicky led successful professional development sessions when she served as a charter school principal, her sessions did not include a formal framework or workshop relevant to cultural competence. A lack of a formal framework or workshop signifies teaching staff joining together or "breaking bread" to discuss relevant topics, but does not always mean teachers decrease or eliminate deficit thinking or disparaging actions. She shared information about professional development sessions about race and identity:

> We are going to spend two full days in our new staff training and do this. We're going to cycle back through it, throughout the year, and whenever we have new staff we would have ... new staff would kind of go through a little Bootcamp around ... we call it the D&I Bootcamp, Diversity and Inclusiveness Bootcamp. And then, could have the conversations and enter in with the rest of us. And as I said, I worked really closely with Dr. Franks and continued to use her as a sounding board.

Vocal Vicky also led sessions dedicated to discussions around content and curriculum, socio-emotional awareness, as well as discipline because her charter school network exercised a "fairly militant style of discipline." She acknowledged some of her staff did not understand the need for professional development sessions about sensitive topics. It took her to be strong in what she believes, which centered on honoring the child.

In Vocal Vicky's follow-up interview, she described interactions with her students and parents when they walked into her building, shaking student's hands and smiling at parents. She implemented aspects of work by Dr. Cheryl Franks who is a professor at John Jay University whose workshops focus on racial identity theory, using skills and strategies to facilitate challenging dialogues on diversity in education and organizational settings, and self-awareness for working effectively in a global and diverse society. As a result of Vocal Vicky's professional development sessions and interactions, parents revealed in surveys their happiness with the school environment as well as meaningful relationships with teaching staff. Her students led a protest about the lack of diversity amongst the teaching staff. She also noted the conviction of her students when she led a roundtable with the NAACP, attributing this to the teaching staff empowering young students. However, Vocal Vicky recognized the differences in how the professional development sessions were received by teachers:

> Teachers who were very uncomfortable with that world and those conversations and what we were doing in professional development, you saw their relationships with kids struggle much more. I think it highlighted even more the stronger certain staff members became at being reflective and being really humble about who they were and what their role and how their race and identity and gender and all that stuff played into their role as a teacher. It was really interesting to watch.

The act of "breaking bread," coming together as a teaching staff to discuss relevant topics impacting students clearly did not change the views of all of her staff. It

begs the question about students' experiences who perhaps did not feel as empowered because their interactions were with the teachers who were not open to changing their views. Consistent and ongoing formal workshops, framework, and differentiated instruction could perhaps influence teachers who were set in their views or at the very least challenge them moving forward.

Shattering oppression. The professional development sessions involving difficult conversations Vocal Vicky referenced pushed some of her staff to embrace the topics they discussed. Serving as a principal placed her in a decision-making position. I could tell by her explanation she was providing the politically correct response to my question about a teacher who had difficulty with cultural competence and couldn't help but wonder the anger she felt about this teacher's actions. She was compelled to confront staff who were not as readily open to accept the challenge about being in an uncomfortable space:

> And I would be very honest to say, "I do not think that you should be teaching like children beyond your cultural identity right now because it's just ... there's too much stuff you're working through.

She highlighted a White male teacher who struggled with cultural competence in her school. I recalled our expressions when she shared this story; a look of sheer and utter disgust and shock:

> Yeah, I had one teacher who very much believed in a more ... like an authoritarian type of discipline: You do what I say 'cause I said so. I am teacher.

> It's not like it's authority. He did not believe that he needed to earn the child's respect. He believed that he should be respected because he's the grown-up in the room. And there was a situation where a student did, I don't know, something silly. And he had the child sit on the floor while he continued to read with his back to the kids. The child was facing this way. (she used her hands and body to indicate positions) And I walked into the room and saw this, and immediately told the child to get up. And I immediately had my Dean take over the classroom and pulled the teacher out of the classroom, and I said, "Your intentions might not be this, but that ... if I took a picture of that, it would be deemed as a highly racist act.

Vocal Vicky confronted the teacher, but he did not understand how his actions were deemed racist. She had subsequent conversations with him and provided literature for him to reference, but much to no avail. She "counseled him out" and he no longer taught at her school. Her actions were a clear act of shattering oppression and centered on the student who suffered from the teacher's behavior.

In addition to the aforementioned teacher, Vocal Vicky shared another teacher who claimed "she did not see race, was colorblind and we're just all from the human race." She stated how:

> It baffled her why children did not connect with her or respond to her. And she openly said, I've never worked with these children. It was very much these kids

and those kids. And then, she would just make excuses around like, I just don't think that they can do it. Her expectations were so low.

Vocal Vicky's response to the comments made by this teacher were another example of someone who desired to shatter oppression:

I could not…I was not going to put children through the amount of time it would have taken her to kind of evolve in her thinking. It just wasn't worth it. The child has one year in that grade, I'm not…it just wasn't at the cost to the child. So she was counseled out as well.

While she attempted to influence these teacher's thought process and sentiments, Vocal Vicky again centered on what was best for her students of color. Allowing these teachers to oppress students of color only reinforces negative educational experiences; experiences that have the power to shape how these students conduct themselves later as adults.

Despite working with teachers who possessed poor cultural competence skills, Vocal Vicky shared a positive experience with a teacher:

So I had a teacher who ... our social worker who became our Dean of Students, was actually the one who connected me with Dr. Franks and he identifies as a White male, also he identifies as gay, and he was ... so just confident in his evolving racial identity. And he really gave ... and he really believed in earning the respect of the community, and the children, and he really modeled that for ...

particularly for the other White teachers on the staff. And he just showed that ... we always say, instead of me having to teach all the White people, right? He would be like, "White people have to teach White people, and I would like to do that. And he does it in such an authentic way. He is still on staff. To this day, has incredibly deep relationships in the community, with the kids, with staff, very much loved. And I think the best part is that he's able to transfer that to others, right? Because it's one thing to be it within yourself, but to be a role model to other educators. I think it's really, really important. And then another…just fascinating watching somebody evolve, coming in and having an experience watching them realize their whiteness, right? And then, going through like literally watching the stages evolve over the course of the year, it was a literature teacher and he has just been so reflective about how his understanding of his own racial identity has helped him in further understanding the racial identity of the kids in which he serves. And now I have now seen that in the way his classroom culture has evolved. I watched how his curriculum evolved and how he…it wasn't about, let's just celebrate Black history month and Black history month. He is like, no we are going…you, yourselves as students, have so much to bring. We're going to bring in your stories and stories of like…it's not just about MLK junior.

Vocal Vicky found witnessing a teacher who had such strong cultural competence skills quite rewarding. This teacher shattered oppression by engaging

teachers who shared his race and perhaps even ethnicity, which in turn created a positive educational experience and environment for students of color. He embodied the level of cultural competence school leaders desire for teachers to possess, an ability to disseminate his cultural competence skills in such a way that both teachers and children grow.

Woke Wilma

Woke Wilma's Background

Woke Wilma in an African American female who was born in Houston and raised by her mother and grandmother. Her parents were married, but separated when she was four years old and later divorced when she was eight. She is first-generation to go to college and the message about education was that it was expected of her to attend. Both her mother and grandmother were very adamant about honors classes and she attended a gifted-talented middle school. From that point on as a child, her mother frequently said, "We're gonna make sure you do everything you're supposed to do to get on the right track and that's when we started talking about college." She emphasized that her mother was self-made, owning her salon and wanted to make sure her daughter went to college because she did not.

She went to the University of California Davis and grappled with her career goals. Her mother told her that she should teach given that she really liked kids, although Woke Wilma acknowledged that she didn't really like kids, but decided to become a teacher. She taught at the Kindergarten level, then got her teaching credentials, became a Dean of Culture and has now been in education for 14 years. She

is currently a principal at a middle school. Woke Woman acknowledged her work is quite exhausting and that she doesn't have much work-life balance.

Woke Wilma's Interview

I contacted the charter school association in Woke Wilma's state to help identify a participant. The senior vice president for regional advocacy showed interest in my study and recalled how difficult it was to find participants when they completed their dissertation. She recommended a principal who was in their cohort and provided her contact information. Woke Wilma emailed me and we set up a time and date to meet near her school at a local meeting space.

When we met, the Woke Wilma shook my hand and we exchanged pleasantries. She brought up how her cohort member and friend contacted her about participating in my study; "I remember trying to get my data for my study, don't you worry." Woke Wilma was dressed in a navy pleated skirt and a gray and navy t-shirt. She had a short pixie hair cut that really suited her face and big brown eyes. Upon first interaction, she was very direct and began asking me a few questions regarding the process. Once I answered her questions, she seemed a bit more at ease and said, "I am ready when you are." We sat at a blue table with two chairs. I took my laptop and phone out to record the interview as we continued to speak. There were other table surrounding us with four chairs, but two chairs were sufficient and set us up for a more intimate conversation.

Mirrors reflect Black gems. The theme, mirrors reflect Black gems, unfolded from Woke Wilma's data. While her student population is predominantly Latino, her responses throughout the interview emphasized a strong dedication to students of color.

She shared a memory, which occurred while working at her charter school network, indicating how she is viewed by some people outside of her race. Woke Wilma's students mirrored her reflection; she was a Black gem who realized if she did not provide them with knowledge rooted in fundamental academics and social justice, they would not be prepared for both covert and overt forms of racism. In turn, Woke Wilma's students, become confident, educated, socially conscious Black gems equipped to resist and fight against racism given they will become young professionals who may have similar professional experiences.

Woke Wilma shared a memory, which described her cultural competence identity:

> It's funny you ask that question because I think I'm just now in a role of leadership figuring that out. I went to school and I was one of very few in college, but it didn't ... I didn't really pay much attention to it. I worked my job in college for the last three years of college with a super White staff, but there was no ... I don't want to say they didn't see color, because that would be stupid of me to say, but I mean we just all interacted a team. Coming here, to this organization where I currently work. At the leadership executive level, I am one of two African American people, and we have a ... The executive team is 14 people. I just recently got a Managing Director of middle school and she's a Black female. Then we have one Asian man on the executive team. We have ... Our CEO is a Latina woman and another one of our school director is a woman of color. So we're now down of five of us of color and nine White people. And

> we are making decisions for an organization that serves 99 percent Latino children. And I'm always talking to them about how this is not okay. I'm not saying we need to go hunt for the people and we can only interview people of color. However, at the executive ... Not even the executive, but out of the supervising manager at that level in this organization, you ask five people of color whether they quit ... Whether they resigned or got fired, doesn't matter. All five of them were replaced by somebody White. So, that is ... So just now is where I'm starting to see how I am viewed as a Black woman. And it's very fresh right now because we're opening our second middle school next month- next week. It is a White woman who is going to be their principal and we have a lot of the same dynamics. But if I say something and she says the same exact thing. If I say it, "Oh my gosh, she's so aggressive. But she says it and she is speaking up for herself and she's using her leadership voice, that is awesome. But I say it and its offensive. We can say the same thing and it never hit me, until working here.

Woke Wilma reflected on this experience realizing that she is very rooted in her personality and who she is as an African American school leader. When asked to comment on how her experience influence her perspective on the Black race, she responded "It's really hard out here for the Black race right now. Particularly the Black male, but I feel like the Black male has been played true. But I think there's so much fire and magic in the Black race that so many people just don't know about." This fire and magic is something she believes that Black children possess as well, "there's still

something missing about the love and support that Black child needs." Her experience also compelled her to think about the interactions her White staff has with Black and Brown children. She stressed the importance of teaching her students "to read, write, and speak properly so that they can get above and beyond. "I ain't keeping them oppressed." School leaders who are Black gems use their experiences to take action, becoming advocates for students of colors. Her mirror reflected students who needed to learn about becoming strong, educated students, while facing racism in our society.

Breaking bread but not breaking shackles. Breaking bread but Not breaking shackles illustrated a theme in Woke Wilma 's data. It referenced the coming together of teaching staff for professional development sessions, engaging in discussions focused on cultural competence, but not being able to reach staff who held deficit perspectives of Black and Brown children. It also referred to the lack of a formal framework or workshop used in professional development sessions specifically designed to target cultural competence. Woke Wilma shared information about professional developmental sessions at her charter school, which she recognized as an area of growth:

> But I think it's an area of growth because I have to step outside of "What does a teacher need," where I can step into a classroom, the kids and I can give them everything that they need and I know what I need, so I have to rewind to, "What did I need when I was in the classroom," and I didn't have an Assistant Principal, or a Dean, or anything. It was just me. Leading this building by myself. So moving into this year it was, "What do you guys need? Tell me." "Tell me what you need so I can get you what you need. I can think of what you need, but the

only person that really knows what you need is you." Last summer, during professional development as a network, so all of our schools together, we had one session on teaching children of color. Great conversations, started the school, it's amazing and you never talk about it again. So I was like, "All right. We definitely gotta do better than that.

In Woke Wilma's follow-up interview, she explained a professional development session centered on culturally responsive teaching:

Over the summer I had my managing director of the middle school do a cultural ... I think it was like an hour and a half PD on culturally responsive teaching. But it was just touching the surface of what does it mean to teach a child of color. I think from there we all start having some sessions once a month about what does it mean to teach a child that's in poverty, no matter what their skin color or race is. And then from there, what does it mean to teach a young black boy, a young black girl, a young Latino boy and a young Latino girl. I mean Latina girl. But I'm going to have to reach out to some people for some help with that, because when you look at, I can tell you about working with little black boys and little black girls, blindfolded and muffled, and I can still explain to you how to work with babies that look like me. And I've worked with Latino kids but I don't think I'm an expert or I have enough knowledge to share that, so I'll be reaching out to my staff or outside colleagues for help with that.

Again, Woke Wilma referenced the need for assistance in providing professional development sessions concentrated on the topic of cultural competence. She continued with an explanation of how the session would run:

> I think it would start off with a video introduction and open discussion, and then from there it would be a workshop where, I think at first I would start off with what is your bias against a child that looks like this? And then start the discussion from there, and then let that discussion guide where to do from there. I think that would set the tone of what do we need to talk about as a staff. I don't really know what everybody's bias is right now. So I think that I would start with that so I can see what people are thinking. If I were to follow-up the session I think that, we send weekly emails every week on the weekends and I think that when I talk about things that are important to culture, step away from educational cultural at some point and put in the culture of the people that we serve. And add some talking points about that, and also when we have our morning huddles there might be a reading or an article that needs to come out about the race of the children that we serve or the economic status of the children that we service, or what's happening politically with the children that we serve.

Woke Wilma saw the importance of "breaking bread" with her staff, but also the need inadequacy of not having any formal way to implement these sessions on a consistent basis, yielding positive results where teachers truly learned effective, strong

cultural competence skills. Breaking bread for the sake of breaking bread does not serve a purpose if the students' needs are not paramount to the endeavor.

Shattering oppression. Post-election last November, Woke Wilma addressed her students and families reassuring them they did not have to be afraid, they were in a safe place. As people listened to her, despite a language barrier and amidst tears, parents were appreciative of acknowledging such uncertain times. She expressed how the election of someone who targets people of color, specifically of Hispanic descent, allowed her staff to come together regardless of any political views and protect the students. Addressing her parents served as a blatant act of shattering oppression, although within the confines of her school. Woke Woman was in a position to influence the students and families she served.

Woke Wilma shared experiences with two teachers on her staff who had difficulty with cultural competence:

> The kids were just talking about this teacher. And I'm like, "What's the deal with this teacher?" Why are they talking about him so much and it wasn't like, "His class is fun," it was just a lot of like "Argh," when they were talking about him. So I started to get notes from the kids about him. And at first I was like, "Okay, they just don't like him, so they think they can get him fired." This is the same group of kids who went through four different teachers in sixth grade. "He told Jesse and I to have our date somewhere else, because we were talking in class and he told us to save our date and have a date somewhere else." That's two boys.

A young Black girl in Woke Wilma's told her that a teacher made her feel uncomfortable and she asked her to explain further:

> He asked me if I knew how many women were scientists." "Out of all the scientists, what percentage of scientists were women." And she was like, "I don't know." And I think he said like 40 percent ... He threw out whatever the statistic was. And then she was like, "Okay." And then he goes, "And do you know what percentage of those women that are White?" And she was like, "No." And he threw out whatever that percentage was and she was like, "Okay." And then he goes, "And what percentage of them are Black?" And she's like, "I don't know." And he goes, "Less than five percent, and if you don't get your behavior together, you won't be able to be a part of that five percent.

Both teachers contributed to creating an unsupportive education environment for students of color, essentially marginalizing these students in offensive and oppressive manners. Woke Wilma said one of the organizational norms is to assume best intentions, but it became clear she found the comments were culturally inappropriate. One of the teachers attempted to explain himself by saying he wanted the young Black girl to pay attention in his class. She provided counseling for him to understand the meaning of his disparaging comment and while he admitted that his comments were racist, he put the onus on the students, saying, "These kids." The teacher ended up leaving his position, but it was unfortunate that he did not see his actions as extremely marginalizing. Woke Wilma an attempted to shatter oppression, but what is never

thought about is how this experience scars students of color. The take away for a seventh grader can be that they will not amount to anything, let alone anything significant.

Despite teachers making disparaging comments, Woke Wilma had a teacher on staff who had strong cultural competence:

> So my eighth grade Humanities teacher last year, who's now my Dean of Instruction, does understand cultural competency and she was a TFA core member, but she just stayed in the profession. She didn't do her two years and leave. She also recognizes that she comes from a place of privilege from Connecticut. Her father sold sailboats and they went to sailing school. Blah, blah, blah, blah. But she said when she walked into her TFA placing somewhere in New York. And she said, "I walked into that classroom and they all looked at me and I looked at them. She said, And I said to myself, this is really different and you need to learn. I think she said at the middle of the school year, she was like, I'm failing these children." I am horrible at my job, and I'm failing these children. So I found teachers in the building who were not failing children. I found teachers in the building who were not failing children who didn't even look like these children, because that's what I really needed to know, was how were they able to do it. I just watched and soaked up everything they did, and I did the same thing. And when I came back year two, I was a totally different person and a totally different teacher. I was just open to learn. She said, first I recognized

that I needed to learn. And not, they needed to learn me, but that I needed to learn them.

The teacher Woke Wilma described showed commitment to students of a differing culture. She possessed the power of shattering oppression, but needed coaching in order to do so. As an African American charter school principal who frequently works with teachers who may not always have the strongest cultural competence skills, this teacher demonstrated a willingness to learn and was open to being uncomfortable. It is in those moments, that the best teaching and learning occurs, benefitting students of color from such interactions.

Confident Constantine

Confident Constantine's Background

Confident Constantine identifies as a Black male born in Chicago. His parents divorced early so he and his younger brother were raised by his mother. They moved to Georgia and he attended high school with kids who had confederate flags on their trucks and t-shirts. "So when people are shocked by what took place in Charlottesville, that these things occur, the friends I grew up with were not shocked at all because it was part of our experience growing up."

The message about education growing up was that college was no exception, we had no choice but to attend. He had a few aunts who completed college, but his mother and some other aunts did not finish. There was a strong message about attending a historically Black college or university (HBCU) and it was embedded in their thinking.

As a result of this, Confident Constantine attended Hampton University, his brother attended A&T and some cousins attended Fam U, Mississippi Valley, Tennessee State, and Morehouse. He considered attending Hampton University as one of the best decisions of his life; "I entered Hampton just a far different person than I left." Confident Constantine expressed that Hampton made him feel proud to be Black and proud to be who he was, walking out with a strong sense of confidence and exceptionalism. He was taught that as a talented person, you also have a responsibility to others; "It is not good enough just to think about self and try to just only enhance your life or your family's life. But you have to commit to some form of service because we are where we are because other people died and gave so much for us, and you have to do your part to continue that."

Confident Constantine also acknowledged that Hampton brought to light the notion that incredibly bright Black people do not "fit into a box." He stated:

> And I think there's often a narrative of what an intelligent Black person should be, what they should look like, how they should sound like, what their interests should be, and when you go to an HBCU, the beauty in it is that you actually see the diversity of Black people. We are not a monolithic people. We don't all come from the same background. We don't have the same interests or perspectives and experiences, and that was wonderful about being at Hampton.

After attending Hampton University, Confident Constantine completed the Teach for America (TFA) program. His ultimate goal was to get a PhD, but he didn't want to

go right out of his undergraduate program. He enjoyed tutoring young people and kids, but TFA, as he explained, "sells you on being this elite program." Without his exposure to other people who were incredibly bright, particularly at Hampton, he was would not have been able to see through the narrative that they sold and the myth of the institutions that the students in TFA attended (he soon discovered that a student who attended a Princeton or Harvard was not as smart as they were cracked up to be). TFA also exposed him to the "profound ignorance that people come into this work with." He recounted a story about a cultural competency session he attended where a White lady raised her hand and asked, "So what do you do when they start to speak their Ebonics?" These moments the grave issue of individuals who state such things being left with Black or Latino kids for eight hours a day, 180 days of the year and question how they will communicate with their parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, "not having any clue." The positives that he found from participating in TFA was that, despite being "super cynical" about White people, he met some really good people. "Just as I don't want them to paint all of us with one brush, I can't do that to them."

Confident Constantine's Interview

I contacted the charter school association in Confident Constantine's state to help identify a participant. The director of charter school growth and support showed interest in my study and agreed to help find a participant. She recommended a principal she was personally familiar with and provided his contact information. I emailed Confident Constantine and we set up a time and date to meet.

I grew nervous when I did not see Confident Constantine at our arranged meeting space, so I sent him an email to ask if we were still confirmed to meet. He said that he was stuck at a construction site for a new school building, but he was on his way to meet with me for the interview. Upon meeting one another, Confident Constantine was dressed in dress slacks, a navy suit jacket, shirt and tie. As soon as he started talking, he exuded this confidence that was palpable. I remember thinking, he went to an HBCU; there was no doubt in my mind. We shook hands and he expressed his apologies for being tardy. "No problem at all," I replied. "I remember my former work school days and there are just never enough hours." He thanked me for choosing him to participate in my study. I explained that he was highly recommended by the charter association and that I was appreciative of him agreeing to do so. We sat at a small desk with two chairs on either side. I pulled my chair closer to his side so that I could hear him as well as for the recording app to catch the entire interview. As I took out my laptop and phone to record, I asked, "Out of curiosity, did you go to an HBCU?" "Yes, I went to Hampton University" he replied. As he said Hampton University, I put my hand across my chest and gasped. "Why, what did I say," he asked. "We are rivals, I went to Howard University," I replied. We both laughed and he jokingly followed up with, "I don't know if I can do this interview." There is something to be said about being able to identify people who went to an HBCU. It's just something about the way we carry ourselves that gives it away. I was really looking forward to our interview after this exchange. After we collected ourselves, I pressed record and began the interview.

Mirrors reflect Black gems. Confident Constantine's data revealed the theme, mirrors reflect Black gems. Growing up in the south around people who held racist views about Black people was the norm for him. He frequently saw people touting confederate flags and guns in his neighborhood. Despite seeing these things, his family encouraged him to attend an HBCU. There was a deep desire for him deepen his innate confidence as a Black male, strengthening his responsibility he had to others in society. His commitment to students of color was a direct result of his upbringing and experiences with people who reminded him that he was part of an oppressed group. The students he serves in his charter school could have similar experiences in the future and he has made it his mission to prepare them with knowledge as well as confidence to withstand. He sees his students in him, both Black gems who possess the brilliance, bravery and tenacity to redress injustice and inequality. A reflection on a memory that occurred as a child and professional adult, influenced his cultural competence identity, nurturing the Black gem who now leads students of color in his school:

> Third grade. Never forget it. I was going to a Catholic school actually in Forest Park, Illinois, which is a suburb right outside of Chicago. Had this friend in third grade, Nick. We always played together, played football together. He was a friend of mine. He was passing out birthday invitations, and I didn't get one. I was like, "Nick, what's up?" He was like, "Well, my parents said I couldn't invite black people to my party." And I was sorta like, "Oh, okay." And I don't even think I ever told my mom that. I think it was a lack of understanding. It was like, "But we're friends. You should understand like, we play together all the time." So

it was just a lack of understanding. Like just complete shock. I was not upset. I don't recall being upset. I never told my mom, so we never spoke about it. It was one of those things where I just could not understand.

He continued with an explanation of how this experience influences his personal and professional life:

Yeah, I mean I think first and foremost, I am again very comfortable and confident in who I am. Sort of all those layers, being black, being a male, at this point in my life, being in class, being a father, I'm very just comfortable with who I am and, I have no issues at all with presenting my full self wherever I am. I think with respect to my work, so last year, we had this teacher, first year teacher. She's from I think Wheaton, Illinois. And she was terrified of me. Terrified. I would talk to my dean a lot, she'd be like, "Yo, she's terrified of you. I knew why, but I'm like, that's your issue. So you gotta deal with that. So if you're uncomfortable because you have these biases." But I do think about it a lot because I recognize that, while I am not going to alter or change who I am, I do want to make sure that I bring these things up so that folks can think and reflect on it for themselves as well, right? Because again, my responsibility is not to change, but I also can't be negligent and just sort of allow you to walk in your ignorance without that ignorance being uninterrupted or unchallenged.

The experience of being told by your best friend that their parents did not want you in their home left him compelled to ensure students of color do not have similar incidents. He stresses a level of acceptance and tolerance amongst his teaching staff that transcends amongst his students as well as parents. The teacher who was scared of him for the mere color of his skin continues to show that we have not made it as far as we think we have. Her beliefs speak to what she thinks about her male students, influencing what they become later in life. Her fear speaks to what Black males deal with when interacting with some young White women. A Black gem prepares young students of color for these very predicaments, using their confidence, intelligence, as well as informed convictions to guide their reactions. A Black gem reflects their shining brilliance for all, illuminating courage and the audacity to address those who view them as dull Black bodies.

Black Pride. Black pride was also a sub-theme revealed in Confident Constantine's data which represented the pride in himself, his students of color, the Black race, as well as contributed to his cultural competence identity:

It makes you feel proud to be black and proud to be you. So you walk out into the world just with this confidence that who you are is not only enough, but who you are is exceptional. Where like you are a talented person, but you also have a responsibility as well. It is not good enough just to think about self and try to just only enhance your life or your family's life. But like you have to commit to some form of service because we are where we are because other people died and gave so much for us, and you have to do your part to continue that.

Breaking bread but not breaking shackles. Breaking bread but Not breaking shackles is another theme that emerged from Confident Constantine's data. Professional development sessions have the power to educate teachers in such a way that they learn effective teaching tools about topics such as discipline, classroom management skills, and culturally relevant pedagogy. He understood the need to provide professional development sessions, but felt they needed to be tangible, consistent, as well as meaningful; "breaking bread" for the sake of "breaking bread" does not serve a purpose. When professional development sessions centered around cultural competence have the potential to address deficit thinking exhibited by a teaching staff and they fail to do so, both the teachers and students do not grow. He shared his perspective about professional development sessions:

> I think PDs can be very helpful, but sometimes they can be very theoretical, right? And not be as practical or as applicable, and so really cultivating this culture where we have to be cognizant, right? And so the way that you do it is that you always have to talk about it. If you talk about it, then it'll just breed more awareness, but if you only limit it to when you have a PD once every three months, then folks gonna be tuned in for an hour, and then they're gonna tune right back out.

Although Confident Constantine felt professional development sessions could be helpful, the sessions he implemented were not meeting the needs of his staff:

So we started ‘em last year, and they weren’t great. So we hired this professor that works at Northwestern University, and she’s done a lot of work with it. She’s very knowledgeable, but just the delivery, it wasn’t great. So that did not go well. So this year, I've sort of looked at a few different resources, and I'm just trying to actually just do it myself. But it's more about sort of creating things for us to reflect on and then apply, right? So I'm not gonna purport to be an expert on these things. What I can do is provide sort of this reading with this scenario as it relates to our work? But what I can do is sort of provide these shared experiences for us and these opportunities for dialogue and application, right? So one of the things that we're trying to do this year is to take the theory out of it and just try to be as- Practical as possible, but also to your point, sort of differentiate the support as well. Because everybody does come in at different places, and I think one of our reflections as a leadership team was that it's actually a disservice to always try to do a one size fits all thing, because you're probably only actually getting at 20 to 30% of the people. So then you're wasting a lot of people's time. So then, they're not invested in the PDs down the road. That's not because of them, it's because they've sat in a lot of PDs that were not helpful.

Additionally, Confident Constantine noted he will have his staff work in small groups, especially when addressing sensitive topics. While he appreciated the importance of professional development sessions, attempting to incorporate a professor from a reputable university, he recognized “breaking bread” without clear intentions did

not benefit his staff nor broaden their awareness. Given the unsuccessful delivery, it is important to note there was not a mention of a formal framework or workshop, incorporating differentiated instruction and implemented on a consistent basis. This comprehensive professional development framework could serve as the way school leaders successfully begin to break the shackles students of color "wear" when they enter schools and are marginalized by the educators who are responsible for influencing their life trajectory.

Shattering oppression. Confident Constantine's data unmasked the theme, shattering oppression. As the figure head in his school, Confident Constantine realized his position of power and clout. With this power and clout, he as well as his staff shattered oppression through ways in which they interacted with students and parents. Each day he enters his school, Confident Constantine openly expresses his feelings to his students:

> I gotta let all students, but especially my black students, know that I love them, right? I try to do a lot of hugs or hands on the shoulders, or like a two-handed handshake with kids, you know what I mean? I want kids to know that I love you. I'm still gonna love you. And because I love you, that's exactly why my bar is so high. You know what I mean? Because I know the promise that you hold within yourself, I'm not gonna let you cut corners. You know what I mean? I don't necessarily care that if like me, but you're gonna know that I love you, and I respect you, and I'm gonna keep pushing. I'm gonna push, I'm gonna push, and I'm gonna push. I'm not gonna accept your BS, you know what I mean? But that

does not mean that we're also not gonna work through challenges, right? Because it's a process.

He expected his staff to verbally express the pride they felt in their students, especially if they did not feel comfortable physically connecting with students. While he did not perceive these acts as an expression of cultural competence, Confident Constantine used these opportunities for his students to know their place and possibilities in life. These acts demonstrate an African American charter school principal indebted to shattering oppressive incidents students of color often encounter in educational settings.

When asked about a teacher who had difficulty with cultural competence, Confident Constantine noted a White female teacher at his school:

> She was working with some of our 8th graders, and I guess something happened where they may not have been listening to her that day or something, and she told them like, "I can't wait until you get your rejection letters from the high schools you applied to, so that way you know what you were doing and why.

When Confident Constantine approached the teacher, she was unable to provide an explanation for her behavior. In response to her comment, Confident Constantine dismissed her from his school. The decision to excuse this teacher from her service showed his commitment to his students of color, appropriately addressing oppressive incidents.

Despite encountering a teacher who lacked cultural competence, he also recognized his leadership team as educators who at the beginning of his tenure had difficulty engaging in conversations about race, their students, and privilege, but grew to trust him and openly address these issues. He noted their "strong awareness and commitment to growing, not just as professionals, but as people and they recognized that their families had to be partners with them if they wanted to be successful in their work."

When asked about a teacher who possessed strong cultural competence skills, Confident Constantine concentrated on his kindergarten through 2nd grade Dean who is a socially aware White male and "okay with being vulnerable, which I think leads to a lot of productivity in conversations." He viewed the dean's vulnerability as a means to shatter oppression in his school and felt compelled to also show vulnerability with his staff. As a result, he created meaningful relationships and engaged in conversations with his teaching staff pushing one another to build supportive educational environments for his students of color.

Analysis of Findings

The eight African American charter school principals in this study dedicated their career creating an educational environment where students of color were nurtured to become confident, independent, educated, emotionally healthy adults. As the principals spoke freely about their personal experiences with learning they were part of an oppressed group, professional development sessions and teachers who either possessed or lacked cultural competence, overarching themes began to reveal themselves. Those themes included: (a) mirrors reflect Black gems; (b) Breaking bread but Not breaking

shackles; and (c) shattering oppression. Each of these African American charter school principals were firmly dedicated to their students of color, pushing and nurturing them to become educated and confidence. Their cultural competence identity attributed to the way they led their professional lives and charter schools. The principals believed providing professional development sessions targeting cultural competence helped their teachers become culturally proficient. They also made decisions about the best ways to strengthen a teachers' developed cultural competence skills and whether to counsel or dismiss a teacher if they struggled with cultural competence.

Findings of my study relied on the undergirding research questions. The next section includes a synthesis of personal backgrounds about the African American charter school participants, their cultural competence identity and impact on teacher faculty development. Although each participant described their cultural competence identity, exercises of professional development for cultural proficiency, and interpreted their acts of cultural competence related to teacher faculty development in different ways, their responses were greatly connected.

Findings Research Question 1: Mirrors Reflect Black Gems

The first research question asked, "How do African American charter school principals describe their cultural competence identities?" Mirrors reflect Black gems emerged as a theme amongst participants, representing how their personal experiences described their cultural competence identity. Each participant recalled an experience with someone who reminded them of their place as an African American person. These memories not only influenced the way they led their professional lives, they were

compelled to see their students of color as their reflection. The reflection of Black gems revealed principals committed to educating young students of color, the other being prepared to face racial adversity with the education they were receiving. The African American charter school principals in this study saw the link between the importance in teaching students of color to read and write as well as cultivating a culturally competent staff. They recognized that the strongest academic teacher will not reach his or her students without viewing them as educated human beings.

Each participant had their unique experiences in developing their cultural competence identity. Cuba Cruise, Vocal Vicky and Confident Constantine recalled experiences occurring as children where they were reminded of being part of an oppressed group. Purple Pauline, Amtrak Archie, Caci Commute, Gayle Grad, and Woke Wilma were reminded of their place in society as adults. It was remarkable how vivid the memories were for all of them, as if these experiences occurred recently. These experiences speak to the notion that people of color are reminded in various forms and in various venues the position they are in because of the color of their skin. It also addresses the notion that if we do not work to remedy this, our young children of color will continue experiencing this as well.

Black Pride. The first research question was also answered through the sub-theme, Black Pride, which represented the pride in themselves, their students of color, and Black race. Racial pride has been implicated in African American achievement motivation processes, directly and indirectly. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) posit that Black students' underachievement is due to the conflict between endorsing their group's

cultural identity and the values associated with mainstream pathways to attainment (including schooling). According to their cultural-ecological framework, involuntary minority groups (like African Americans) are particularly likely to develop personal identities that do not include a focus on education, because those groups have experienced barriers to success in that domain.

The pride that both Gayle Grad and Confident Constantine reflected our collective power as a race and as educators. Their commitment to and love of their race compelled them to ensure positive educational experiences for Black and Brown children; underachievement was not an option for these educator's students.

Findings Research Question 2: Breaking Bread but not Breaking Shackles

The second research question asked, "How do African American charter school principals describe exercises of professional development for cultural proficiency?" Although the African American charter school principals in my study illustrated exercises of professional development for cultural proficiency in various ways, the data revealed the theme of breaking bread, but not breaking shackles. Deneen and Catanese (2011) suggest the term enslavement describes urban schools charged with educating a majority of children in our impoverished major cities. These schools fail our country by not providing the educated citizenry who can maintain the nation's social, political, and economic health. Providing and participating in professional development sessions do not signify all teachers' learning how to be culturally proficient. Not only are students of color marginalized in our society, but they enter schools "wearing" shackles, experiencing oppression through interactions with teachers. Professional development

sessions, especially sessions targeting cultural competence, are designed to address hegemonic behaviors and deficit thinking. However, the principals in my study acknowledged the professional development sessions did not always meet the needs of their teaching staff. In addition to this issue, there was seldom reference to following a formal framework or workshop targeting cultural competence on a consistent basis.

Findings Research Question 3: Shattering Oppression

The third research question was, "How do African American charter school principals interpret their acts of cultural competence?" Shattering oppression emerged as the overarching theme addressing this question. The African American charter school principals in my study highlighted teachers who either struggled with or showed proficiency with cultural competence skills. If a teacher struggled with this area, then these school leaders either decided to counsel them or dismissed teachers from their teaching post. These acts demonstrated their commitment to shattering oppressive incidents students of color often experience in their schools. Paramount to each participant was the recruitment of diverse populations on their teaching staff, again reiterating acts of shattering oppression in their schools. Each of the principals participated in their school's hiring practices to employ teachers who were culturally competent and could connect with their students and families. Gayle Grad, for example, expressed that when she met with prospective candidates and they spoke about teaching young children of color from a savior standpoint, she did not extend an offer to come work at her school. She shattered the oppression before it even stepped into her classroom. School leaders in this study were extremely culturally responsive and this

characteristic guided their daily practices and interactions with teachers, but mainly professional development sessions.

Discussion

Mirrors reflect Black gems for me expresses how the principals saw their reflections in their students. Their recollections of memories that described their cultural competence involved incidents where they were reminded of being part of an oppressed group. They sought to be school leaders who prepared their students for similar encounters in the future. For example, Confident Constantine explained his commitment to students becoming success and well-versed.:

> I think first and foremost, I want to be for my students, for my families, and for my teachers, successful, right? I think just being an example of success is important for people to, not just see, but actually interact with and know. But with that, also sort of then breaking down, again, these myths about what success looks like, or sort of what you have to be or sound like or do to be successful, right? I want people to know that you can be very successful, and also go to your cousin's house and play dominoes. You know what I mean? Play spades and do all these things, right? Like you can be successful, and have Kendrick Lamar turned all the way up on your radio as you're walking to the car, right? But also, you might have Kendrick Lamar on the way home, but you could be listening to *On Being with Krista Tippett* with NPR on the way in the evening. Yeah, my aunt was always, Just try things. If you have any interest, any inkling, scratch that itch. 'Cause you're never know where it'll lead.

As a child, his family encouraged him to try any and everything, from tennis all the way to learning the violin. Confident Constantine's family made sure that he was prepared to defy the expectation of only knowing how to rap. We talked openly about how the power of knowledge and being well-versed in instances where your intelligence is doubted for the sheer color of your skin. Despite interacting with someone who displays deficit thinking, your knowledge can be used to confront racism. Vocal Vicky used her upbringing as a biracial woman to shape her identity, which vacillates on a spectrum, but constantly evolves. As a result of her upbringing, she inherently honored all aspects of her students and their families. Cuba Cruise recalled her parents telling her to become an educator and used their encouragement as a model for doing the same for her students. Purple Pauline's exposure to Black leaders growing up in Guyana prompted her to become a school leader who wanted to expose students to the role people of color had in the evolution of mankind. As a young student heading off to college, Amtrak Archie experienced deficit thinking when he believed he was simply being responsible for the trajectory of his life. He became a principal who wanted to ensure young Black men were not only responsible for their life trajectory, but equipped with the knowledge and self-advocacy skills to face racial adversity. He also expressed his desire for change within preparation training programs:

> I just think, I think this work is important. I think to the degree that we can, making cultural competency a part of training preparation for teachers, principals, and also families. I think we have to be transparent with families and

empower them to understand all that it takes to really serve them well. I mean, I think it could be truly a transformation to finally prepare leaders and teachers.

Witnessing high rates of teen pregnancy and lack of supervision in homes, Caci Commute used this to become a principal determined to reverse statistics that surround students of color in urban environments. Woke Wilma used the double standard she encounters when interacting with White women in her charter school network to prepare students for the potential racial adversity they may face in the future. When we spoke about Woke Wilma's strife with White women accusing her of being aggressive and angry, I vividly recalled voicing my wish for a tambourine; it felt like she was preaching and I was nodding my head affirming the sermon.

Tambourines in a church setting are used for a variety of different reasons including: praise, rejoicing, singing, and triumph. In the bible, the tambourine was used as an instrument of praise and warfare, often leading armies into battle. Exodus, chapter 15, verse 21 says, "Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing." In churches with a predominantly Black congregation, it is common to see people dancing and praising whilst shaking tambourines. My conversation with Woke Wilma about her experience reaffirmed these moments of dance and praise because we could both relate to being told we were assertive or aggressive. I recalled being told by the co-founder of my former school, who was a White, Scottish woman that I was persistent because I frequently voiced my opinion about how Black and Brown children could not read. Another White

teacher in the school however, who yelled at people in staff meetings, was described as not being socialized properly. In other words, the White teacher got a pass, while I was given the label of persistent. These experiences are the case for many Black women who are vilified for openly expressing and standing firm in their convictions. It is imperative to empathize with the personal effects of the dichotomous situation of being a woman and educator (Pinar & Grumet, 2014; Pinar & Miller, 1982). I am reminded of Black feminist thought and movement, in which the standpoints of African American women are supported and it is presumed that African American women have a unique perspective of their experiences with certain commonalities shared by other African American women (hooks, 1981, 1984; Collins, 1989, 1990). Gayle Grad's upbringing magnified her allegiance to Black students. For example, she stated, "I think one of the things that was important for me is this whole idea of 100% of my students being able to succeed and this idea of we don't accept anything less than the best for my students." Despite each participant's individual background, their steadfastness in life fostered exceptional charter school leadership, greatly impacting the lives of their Black and Brown children.

Breaking bread but Not breaking shackles personally signifies the notion of coming together or "breaking bread" to simply talk about culturally relevant topics, but not addressing how teachers learn to eradicate deficit thinking. Cuba Cruise hosted school leaders and educators dedicated to African centered curriculum, but did not reference a formal framework or workshop offered to her teaching staff. While Purple Pauline implemented a three-day formal professional development workshop entitled,

Teaching for Change, it was not done so on a consistent basis. She acknowledged that there were still staff who did not connect the Montessori philosophy to student discipline. Amtrak Archie brought his teaching staff together to address the male literacy crisis, but it also was not rooted in a formal framework or workshop. For example, Amtrak Archie also trained his teachers to model reading strategies for parents or caregivers:

> When parents used to come in for report cards, we used to sit and practice with parents how to address certain skill deficits. Right? If thought that fluency was a challenge, and we used to do this with K1 and then some of our second grade scholars, but if fluency was a challenge and we'd say, So mom, here's how you're gonna support us. We need you for 15 to 20 minutes a night. We need you to read these sets of books and then have Jason read them back to you. Here's what it looks like. I'm gonna model it and then I'm gonna give you an opportunity to practice. Alright? Then, some families were reluctant. Some families were like, "Really, like that's what you need me ...and I'm like, Yeah. Let's practice it just so you can start to develop some comfort and familiarity," for families who aren't in a position where they were able to do those things. Sometimes we did it with older brothers. No, send Jack in here because I know he picks him up and we're gonna do it with Jack, mom. I know that you work, right, and those hips on the hedges, going to be one of his responsibilities.

There were positive results in student achievement, but there were still teachers who did not connect the male literacy crisis to cultural competence. No matter how developed a teacher's ability is to teach literacy skills, as long as deficit thinking prevails, students of color could be left with scarring experiences.

Caci Commute acknowledged she would have to plan early for cultural competence professional development sessions. After making no mention of a formal workshop or framework, she too engaged in sessions of bringing teaching staff together, but not making the lasting changes needed for every teacher to employ culturally relevant teaching. Gayle Grad was able to share professional development sessions she offered in her school, however these sessions were not based on any formal frameworks or workshops. The professional development sessions Vocal Vicky offered in her school separated her teachers who struggled with cultural competence and those who demonstrated strong cultural competence skills. She referenced the workshops developed by Dr. Cheryl Franks, but some teachers in her school persisted in their deficit perspectives. Woke Wilma openly disclosed that she did not sufficiently implement professional development sessions targeting cultural competence. She also could not pinpoint any formal frameworks or workshops on which she based her sessions. While we spoke, I recommended a book for her to read entitled, *Other People's Children* given the author's work transcends amongst the urban education realm. Confident Constantine's also brought his staff together for professional development sessions, but emphasized that these sessions do not always have to take place as a big group. During

his follow-up interview, he explained how he would run a professional development session at his school:

> Yeah, I got it. A lot of what it would look like is when we have different advisory groups that we've already established. These are work groups of adults so, one it would be like small groups where we do it in that way and then it would be a mix back. So, some days what it would be is a reading and a reflection and an action item. One of the things that I believe very strongly is that to get it from the theoretical sort of practical, there has to be some action that has to happen. That would be a part of all the close outs but then recognize that sometimes you just need space for people to talk. And for so, in those situations what we would do is that we would provide almost not necessarily a trainer because I don't want individuals to feel like they have to be the ones responsible for guiding people through this but I mean more so, here are the question of ops want your group to discuss, have at it. I do recognize I still have to do a little bit more thinking about how I want this to work out.

While small advisory groups and differentiated instruction were key to the way in which Confident Constantine's ran his professional development sessions, it was clear he needed assistance with executing a cohesive, comprehensive program. "Breaking bread" must yield tangible action and results in order for a teaching staff to learn appropriate ways of interacting with students of color and their families.

Shattering oppression represents the idea of specific decisions made by the African American charter school principals to either nurture culturally competent teachers or excuse teachers who struggled in this area. Additionally, the idea of shattering oppression highlighted teachers who consciously shattered oppression within their classrooms through their strong cultural competence skills and other acts of cultural competence that shattered oppression. This also embodied these charter school principal's hiring practices, which they each communicated were important. Hiring practices of each charter school principal also embodied the idea of shattering oppression. They each emphasized the need for a diverse staff in order for students of color to have instructors from varying races, cultures, and/or ethnicities. Students of color simultaneously learn about different people while gaining exposure to a globally diverse society. For example, Caci Commute shared her thoughts about hiring a diverse staff:

> But when I'm thinking about the decisions that I'm making, I'm also thinking, oh it would be great. You may not be the strongest person right now, but you're a culture that we don't have here. And we probably could develop you." If I feel like this person is coachable and they have certain skills, I want them on board sometimes, because they're something we don't have. We had a Chinese teacher last year. We lost one teacher who was Indian. So I definitely try to create some level of diversity. I got a little bit too carried away with trying to make sure I had more African-American staff members, and now trying to get back some more of our Caucasian teachers... Sometimes that's a little bit too much, that's what they

see every day all day. They need more diversity so they can actually learn from it as well.

Caci Commute was aware that the world her students live in does not reflect diversity. It became her mission to shatter any biases or assumptions her students may make about others. She provided feedback to a teacher who struggled with cultural competence, but also did not have a formal framework or workshop to employ with her staff. Perhaps, if the teacher she highlighted participated in cultural competence sessions, one-on-one coaching, and other forms of differentiated professional development, they would have understood the student's actions from a cultural perspective. The student would not have felt scrutinized by the teacher who felt their actions were inappropriate. A diverse teaching staff does not automatically negate cultural competence, it takes much more than that to shatter oppression students often confront in their schools.

Gayle Grad made decisions in her school about whether to let a teacher go or work with them to develop or enhance their cultural competence skills. Her conviction about setting a standard for Black and Brown children was paramount to how she led her school. Additionally, she–like Caci Commute–shattered oppression through her hiring practices, particularly from the perspective of the unspoken. For example, she attended many recruiting sessions for her charter school and she learned about people while looking to hire teachers:

> I learned from that process that people would leave stacks of resumes, because they saw the name of the neighborhood, but would not talk to me when I walked and wasn't sitting at the table. I think it was just as important for me to have people in front of the kids who love the kids and will be committed to the kids, people who will push the kids for a level of excellence.

She truly felt that if a prospective candidate could not engage in conversation with Gayle Grad away from the recruiting table, then it spoke volumes as to how they would interact with students of color. Is the way they would behave in class differ after that bell rings? She shattered oppression at times before it even entered her school. Amtrak Archie also described teachers who had strong cultural competence skills and those who struggled in this area. He made decisions about whether to nurture or excuse a teacher regarding their cultural competence skills, always keeping the boys in school at the forefront of these decisions. He also shattered oppression through vetting and editing every document that went to their families from teachers:

> I've seen documents that went to families that were in poverty in other places. I've seen documents that went to families in affluent districts and the distinct differences and the care and quality of what was produced in writing for families who were affluent, I wanted that for my families and my boys as well. Teachers, I think, understood very early on you are going to treat these boys the way that you want your nieces, nephews, and your own children to be treated. I think it was one of the ways that I tried to just be an advocate for the boys.

Amtrak Archie shattered oppression through ensuring the appropriate and equal language for his students and families. The parents of his students could have been equally aware of the difference in language and instead of allowing his parents to feel inferior, he took it upon himself to shatter this oppressive behavior.

While Cuba Cruise described a teacher, who showed strong cultural competence skills, she also credited her African centered curriculum as a means to shatter oppression. The education and strong cultural competence skills demonstrated by one of her teachers greatly impacted a former student at her school. "Art is the big promising thing that I can think of with him. We had a girl, who is in high school now, and she entered the Google contest, Doodle 4 Google, whatever it's called, and she won. It was over thousands of dollars that she won. She was interviewed by the newspaper, and she gave all the credit to Baba Kamara who taught her about her history and her culture and showed her how to do artistic things. That went all over the country." It became clear Cuba Cruise prepared students to be part of a society that does not always appreciate the work of African American art, let alone believe they are capable of producing. Given many art programs are removed from urban school environments and taken away from students of color, she placed this student at the heart of shattering oppression.

Purple Pauline noted teachers who exemplified strong cultural competence skills as well as those who struggled in this area when interacting with students. The teachers were coached about their deficits with the goal of changing oppressive experiences for students. Throughout Purple Pauline's interview, she also emphasized how Montessori

for her, is cultivation of the heart. She felt like students of color needed to be included in this type of education, but not from a savior standpoint, but that of awareness that could ultimately decrease racism and hate in the world. In her view, a Montessori education was a means to shattering oppression. She created a program where parents could rent Montessori equipment, attend a training session and then use the equipment at home. In this manner, parents learned how to teach their children Montessori skills, but also learn the ways of the heart.

Vicky Vocal shattered oppression by choosing to either let go teachers who struggled with cultural competence or nurture those who did not. When she became the principal of her charter school, she worked with pre-existing staff as well as new teachers she was able to hire. Her hiring practices were dedicated to finding teachers who were able to engage in difficult dialogues about sensitive topics related to race, identity, and culture. She also wanted teachers who demonstrated love for their students. And so when I have them with students, and if I felt that discomfort, then that wasn't going to be a good fit." She credited her ability to sense discomfort of teachers when interacting with students and wanted eradicate this type of oppression for her students of color before it occurred. Woke Wilma acknowledged that she had to put her assumptions and biases aside when working with White women. Post-election, her White staff were sobbing and Woke Wilma could not figure out why they were crying; their mere position as a White woman was in their favor. However, she realized because they were aware of the impact on their students of color, they felt hopeless. They built

relationships with their students of color and their families making it quite difficult to move forward.

Confident Constantine's decision to let the teacher in his school go who told her eighth graders they were not going to get into any of the high schools to which they applied is an example of shattering oppression. He also shared information with his staff regarding brain function:

> The brain and neuroscience and all that stuff since there's just so much research that points to how these interactions can help create different synapses in young people's heads and how the brain can be altered or impacted based on how the exposure that students have to positivity and warmth and love, even the music they're listening to. All these different stimuli have an impact on how our students are shaped and molded. But we want to make sure that we are really, really cognizant and aware of that.

Incorporating this behavior alone greatly impacted Confident Constantine's students, creating an environment where students did not feel oppressed. He became more involved in hiring practices in his school, partaking in the initial interviews to encourage more diversity amongst his staff. While a diverse staff did not automatically dictate cultural competence, Confident Constantine was cognizant of creating an environment where students did not feel inferior and in fact were empowered to become educated, professionals of color.

Summary

Each principal recalled memories of being reminded they were part of an oppressed group. Using these memories as a positive motivation, their cultural competence identity formed in turn shaping their dedication to educating students of color. The African American principals also attributed these memories to learning how to successfully navigate their professional lives, becoming Black gems who saw their students in their reflections. It was imperative for each of these principals to exercise acts of cultural competence in their schools in order to prepare students of color for all facets of racism. They sought to offer professional development sessions targeting cultural competence, but were not always able to meet the needs of all teaching staff members. Their sessions brought staff together to "break bread," but did not break shackles the students of color "wear" in schools as deficit thinking and hegemonic behaviors at times prevailed. Even though the professional sessions did not meet every teacher's need within their schools, each participant consciously chose to shatter oppression. They also encouraged to their teachers to learn how to shatter oppression within their schools.

CHAPTER V

LINKS TO LITERATURE, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUMMARY

Rapidly changing demographics demand that we engage in a vigorous, ongoing, and systemic process professional development to prepare all charter school principals and teaching staff to function in a highly diverse environment. Findings of the current study indicate the need for broad scale changes to professional development delivery. This chapter explores links between the current findings of this study and existing literature. The end of the chapter details recommendations, implications for future research, and conclusions from the study.

Links to Literature

My study fostered my own phenomenological experiences in accordance with *currere*. Their lived truths allowed me to access their culturally competent ideologies and identify links to the literature. For example, while the current methods of professional development typically include workshops, conferences, lectures, university classes, in-service trainings, coaching, peer observations and mentoring, researchers believe that they are not always the most effective ways to improve their educational pedagogy. Cuba Cruise provided professional development sessions comprised of lectures and both large and small group discussions. Purple Pauline also provided a three-day workshop focused on social justice for her teachers and had them complete an evaluation at its culmination. Researchers deem both of these methods as ineffective ways to improve educational pedagogy.

Guskey (2000) identified "high-quality professional development principles." These principles included: 1) clear focus on learning and learners; 2) emphasis on individual and organizational change; 3) importance of small changes guiding the grand vision; and 4) on-going procedurally embedded professional development. Confident Constantine shared that he shakes his student's hands, holds their shoulders while expressing his love and belief in them. These acts allowed Confident Constantine to focus on the educators in his building learning how to meet the needs of all their students, linking a healthy learning environment to academic achievement. He reported that when his teachers began to express their belief and love for their students, this individual change impacted overall organizational change. This small change guided the grand vision of every student of color succeeding in Confident Constantine's school. While he did not expect his teachers to make physical contact with their students, he wanted them to at the very least verbally express their beliefs and support in their students. He believed that when students came to his school, surrounded by educators who believe in them, their self-esteem and academic achievement both strengthened. These acts were embedded in every day practice, which were not the typical lectures, workshops, or conferences school leaders provide for their teaching staff. Sparks (2002) states:

> While workshops and courses are the most familiar forms of professional development, they are often not the most appropriate to achieve certain objectives. Many types of activities that cause teachers to collaborate in serious

> and sustained ways and to reflect on their work and its effects on student learning are important but typically overlooked. (p. 9)

The participants in my study identified cultural competence professional development sessions that were aligned with ineffective methods to meet the needs of their educators. While two participants held one- or three-day workshops or lectures, these sessions were not implemented on a consistent basis and were not rooted in a formal framework. Confident Constantine and Caci Commute, for example, expressed their need to work on more tangible cultural competence professional development sessions. While the literature regarding professional development confirms the need for more serious and sustained ways to improve educational pedagogy, there is not a call within the literature to implement a formal framework to achieve these results. A subject such as cultural competence warrants a formal framework for school leaders to reference in order to ensure ongoing, meaningful activities, which ultimately impact students of color. While the school leaders in my study possessed strong cultural competence skills, they were not able to influence all of their teachers. A formal framework (see figure 5) to which they could reference has the potential to aid school leaders in how they counsel teachers in regards to cultural competence training. The participants in my study all identified professional development sessions they implement for their staff. However, it became more evident that they had greater difficulty conceptualizing professional development sessions that were previously prepared, implemented on an ongoing basis, and proven to generate a comprehensive understanding of cultural competence. If this framework

existed, then perhaps participants would not have shared that they put sessions together on their own or with their administrative staff.

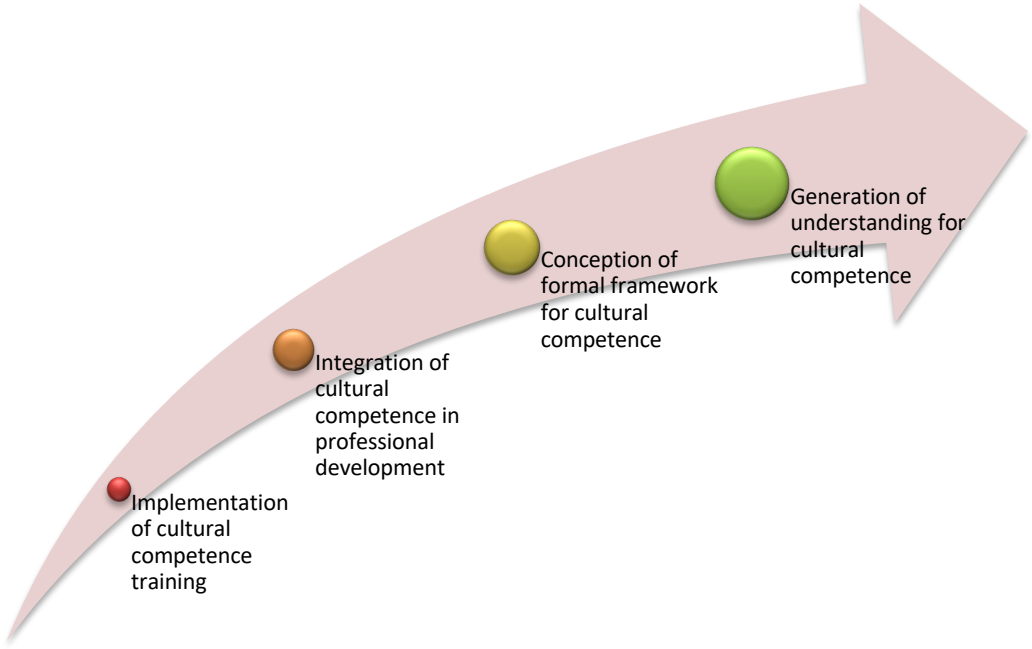


Figure 5. Illustration of the outcome from the implementation, integration, and conception of a formal framework on the generation of understanding for cultural competence.

The incidents shared by the African American charter school principals are inextricably connected to the theoretical underpinnings in my study. Understanding the importance of stages in the Nigrescence process provides greater insight into the African American charter school principals' journey. When asked to define the moment in

which they were reminded of being part of an oppressed group, it was clear they were demonstrating they were in stage two of the Nigrescence process. They all may not have held negative views of about themselves as African American individuals, but they described a personal experience that dislodged them from the way they viewed the world and how others viewed them. Their "conversion" involved becoming Black gems who dedicated their lives and careers to the advancement of African American children. It was through these experiences, that they felt compelled to accept they are part of an oppressed racial group and the consequence of racism in their lives.

Specific phases of the transformative learning theory were also relevant to the responses provided by my participants. In regards to the first research question, each African American charter school principal reported a disorienting dilemma, one that showed them they were part of an oppressed group. The early phases, such as the second and third, were also relevant as they self-examined their emotions and assessed their assumptions. As a result of learning they were part of an oppressed group, principals revealed they were inadvertently forced to self-examine their emotions and assess their assumptions. For example, Caci Commute felt inferior when she arrived to college, feeling as if she could not relate to other students because they had more exposure. She also assumed others viewed her as inferior, but later realized through interactions and conversations, she shared knowledge and had things in common.

Theory of Nigrescence and Transformative Learning Theory

Responses provided by the eight African American charter school principals gave rise to the theoretical frameworks I chose to conceptualize my study. The

participants demonstrated a strong sense of security, acute cognizance of their racial identity, and embraced what it meant to be Black and have Black self-love, a part of the internalization stage of Nigrescence Theory. As a result of their cultural competence identities shaping their lives and becoming school leaders, they aligned themselves not only with the students of color, but also with the those who acknowledged their Black racial identity, therefore becoming bicultural individuals. They developed professional development sessions intended to break the shackles "worn" by students of color and helping teachers become culturally competent in their respective charter school settings. The African American charter school principals also cultivated long-term interests galvanize, which is indicative of being in the internalization-commitment stage. They took action and committed to issues that impact their race, their students of color, and teaching staff. Their actions were dedicated to the betterment and advancement of their race.

The provision of professional development sessions in their schools, targeting cultural competence, is aligned with certain phases of the transformative learning theory. By developing cultural competence professional development sessions, the African American charter school principals demonstrated: (a) an exploration of options for new roles, (b) relationships and actions, (c) planning action steps, (d) gathering information and resources to implement steps, (e) putting action plan into effect, and (f) integrating new perspectives and knowledge into current work. For example, Confident Constantine recognized the need for culturally competent sessions when he saw that his staff was not as diverse as he wanted it to be. He took part in hiring practices, called on staff to help

devise specific professional development topics, engage their feedback about specific professional development topics, gathered information about the needs of his staff, encouraged staff who were culturally competent to lead or play an integral part in difficult conversations and integrated these perspectives and knowledge in his every day work. When he shook hands with his students, expressed his love for them and pushed them to achieve their highest potential, he expected his staff to at the very least verbalize and/or demonstrate similar sentiments. Confident Constantine saw the change in his students when these interactions took place at his school. He did not see professional development as an opportunity to only sit as a large group and talk about a specific topic, he also saw it as individual coaching, modeling the kinds of behavior he wanted teachers to engage. He acknowledged that he needs to think deeply about the best way to implement cultural competence sessions after a session with a professor he brought in was not successful.

Shattering oppression is also aligned with the theoretical frameworks I used to conceptualize my study. The internalization-commitment stage focuses on the "long-term interest of Black affairs over an extended amount of time" (Ritchey, 2014, p.103). These long-term interests galvanize those in the internalization-commitment stage to take action and commit to issues that impact their race. Each of these African American charter school principals highlighted teachers who demonstrated strong cultural competence skills or struggled in this area. In some cases, principals decided to let a teacher go or nurture their ignorance in order to create a more culturally competent staff. This decision demonstrated taking action in their schools that greatly impacted their

students of color. The principals nurtured and helped continue to grow their teachers with strong cultural competence skills. These actions indicate ways in which they shattered oppression. For example, Confident Constantine excused a teacher after making what he believed to be egregious comments to his students of color. He made his position known in his school that he was not going to tolerate those who scarred, dehumanized and demoralized his students. Confident Constantine felt galvanized to advance the students of color academically and socio-emotionally.

Also, applicable to the participant's responses in this study, phases of the transformative learning theory supported principals' work in developing cultural competence skills. Each African American charter school principal gathered information and resources to guide their decision making about whether to counsel or let a teacher go if they demonstrated poor cultural competence skills. They also explored ways in which their culturally competent staff members could be a model for other teaching staff. This gave some staff members new roles in their schools and allowed them to take action in how to impact teacher faculty development. Shattering oppression in their schools allowed principals to put their action plans into effect. For example, Vocal Vicky, immediately addressed a teacher when she observed him forcing a student to turn their backs to the class when he was giving a lesson.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations based on the findings of this study:

a) Principals should learn formal frameworks or workshops in order to implement cultural competence professional development sessions. Given

only one of the eight participants mentioned this kind of training, it is imperative school administrators become well-versed in this area. The acts of cultural competence exhibited by the principals in this study confirmed their commitment to educating the students of color in their respective school settings. Combining their commitment with the provision of formal cultural competence frameworks or workshops would be beneficial. Consequently, future charter school principals may lead a culturally competent staff who simultaneously educate and prepare students of color for racial adversity.

b) Principals should use a cultural competence model to learn and teach cultural competence skills. The African American charter school principals in this study identified teachers who demonstrated strong cultural competence skills. Modeling of these strategies could be quite successful for teachers interacting with students of color.

c) Principals should be part of the hiring process, from the screening to the onboarding protocol. One of the eight principals emphasized their involvement in diversifying their team as a direct result of being part of the initial phone screening of prospective teachers. As a result of this action, their school reflected a more diverse teaching staff.

Implications for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, the following are suggestions for further research:

a) This study was conducted with eight African American charter school

principals. Given a majority of principals are White, it would be beneficial to replicate this study by listening to the voices of White charter school principals serving predominantly African American and Latino students and their experiences with cultural competence.

b) There is a vast amount of literature on African American school leadership in traditional public schools. However, it would be intriguing to hear from voices of more African American charter school principals. This discourse could lead to extensive insight on the perceptions and nuances of charter school leadership.

c) This research suggests principals grapple with the question of when to let a teacher go for lack of cultural competence. Future research should consider effective models of the development in teacher's cultural competence to inform principals decision-making on nurturing, working with or dismissing a teacher.

d) Investigate the curricula of principal preparation programs to determine their inclusion of cultural competence. This investigation has the potential to create robust policies impacting preparation programs. In doing so, principal preparation programs would be standardized to address cultural competence skills and related professional development sessions.

e) This study applied the theory of Nigrescence to examine African American charter school principals' cultural competence identity and impact on cultural competence professional development. Future studies could employ

intersectionality lending itself to revealing multiple complexities between race, gender, and cultural competence.

f) Explore the notion of going through a process experienced by African American women that is more significant than "racial battle fatigue," which applies to African American males. Through the lens of Black Feminist Theory, a future study could reveal a process that is "more than a battle or war" for African American women when confronted with racism and sexism.

As a former speech-language pathologist working in an urban charter school and aspiring higher educational leader, I believe in equality of access and equity of outcomes for students of color. The African American charter school principals in my study served to redress the issues of inequality and inequity amongst their student population, but also create culturally competent teachers. They recognized the direct link between cultural competence and student academic achievement. I am confident they will continue being an exemplar and model in the field. The study revealed how their cultural competence identities shaped the way they led their professional lives, described exercises of professional development for cultural proficiency and interpreted their acts of cultural competence as it related to teacher faculty development.

It is my goal for the experiences shared by the African American charter school principals in my study to serve as the gateway for other charter school principals to contribute descriptions of their lived experiences. This research contributes to a dialogue about African American charter school principals who are part of urban schools.

Additionally, this research also focuses on professional becoming, identification creativity, race consciousness, and constitutive representations (Jupp & Slattery, 2012). Given the dearth of literature regarding African American charter school principals, this research begins to address their role as charter school principals, cultural competence identities and professional development sessions.

Conclusion: Lessons Learned

Participants in this study possessed strong cultural competence and personal confidence, which subsequently impacted their teaching staff and students of color. The African American charter school principals in this study exemplified phenomenal leaders dedicated to students of color and to teaching staff who successfully served this demographic. This group of charter school principals were not simply reporting to a job. They prepared teachers responsible for their students' learning of math, reading and writing and a world that does not always want gems like them. Despite having a well-rounded education, there are people who view others of color as less intelligent savages, animals, and criminals. Racial adversity is omnipresent in our current climate and the African American charter school principals were indebted to students of color who will need necessary skills to confront these issues.

As discussed in chapter 2, proponents contend that charter schools positively influence student and family populations to increase accountability and a sense of responsibility across all stakeholders to transform communities and neighborhoods. Charter schools were meant to offer Black students a chance to excel in communities where the traditional public schools have been failing for many decades. Their purpose

was not only to educate Black and Brown children in urban, impoverished areas, but to also create Black success which is a threat to the political and societal status quo. If this success were considered half as newsworthy as Black failures, then our headline news would be extremely different. While this study investigated eight African American charter school principals, it would be beneficial to continue this investigation. As the data unfolds, the notion of African American led charter schools could allow for cultural control over the education of our children but also create a pipeline for teaching jobs for our brothers and sisters who are studying to be educators — especially if those same institutions can conduct their own leadership and teacher training. Additionally, African American led charter schools could patronize local African American led vendors in food services, landscaping, curriculum, software, and more who cannot currently compete for larger district contracts because they lack the capacity to bid for opportunities at that scale. African American professionals could be hired and supported by these schools, which would then lead to economic empowerment and revitalization of whole communities.

In conducting this research, I left these participants feeling empowered and inspired, but also angry and disappointed. While I have dedicated my career to the betterment of African American and Latino students, I sat with people who lead their professional lives in the daily trenches of educational settings, but are doomed from the beginning because their students are Black and Brown. I listened to stories similar to my own where Black and Brown children encounter people who remind them of the place they hold in American society. I could not help, but to be emotional about how those

students will navigate their lives after being told they will not get into a high school of their choice or forced to sit with their backs turned to their class because of their perceived unwarranted behavior. The exchanges I had with my participants reiterated the importance of how we must "enable the diverse young to join the continually emergent culture's ongoing conversation" (Greene, 1995, p. 56). I was also reminded of how important it is to continue learning about others' lived experiences in regards to racism, particularly as they enter education administrative positions. Based on my personal experience, I wondered if I was I the lucky one who will use my talents constructively because I was grounded in who I am as a Black woman and what my responsibility is to humanity? How many Black and Brown children will continue to be demoralized and dehumanized in schools where the goal is education? The discourse revealed by the African American charter school principals in this study not only demonstrated a commitment to their students of color, but a heightened sense of responsibility and fierce protection of students who were destined to meet with the wrath of racism they face as both young adults and future adult professionals. For example, Amtrak Archie revealed instances where vendors would come to the school and there was doubt as to his position there. He attributed the doubt to his skin tone. Amtrak was not the only principal in this study who reflected on this and his thought process may represent the majority of other African American charter schools.

During my internship as an aspiring principal, I implemented a code of conduct for our school buses; we had reports of fights on the bus as well as buses getting pulled over by the police. When students received consequences for their bus behavior, both

teachers and parents were quite irate. I had a teacher yell at me in the main office because a child in her class was taken off of the bus. Before I could even respond to this teacher, she stormed out of the office. As a result, a meeting was held with her and the principal and I had an opportunity to tell the her what the child did on the bus. Parents also yelled at me regarding the bus code of conduct. Some did not have other ways to transport their child to school, choosing to keep their child home should the consequence involve being taken off of the bus for a limited time. Based on my conversations with the principals in my study, I learned of the integrity of transparency as well as the respect transparency garners with one's teaching staff. I should have met with both teachers and parents about the impending bus code of conduct. They would have gained insight as to the necessity for the new rules as well as understood my commitment to the safety of our students.

I vividly remember the teacher who told me to go back to where I came from and that Jews stay with the Jews, Whites with the Whites, and Blacks with the Blacks. I remember the letter my father wrote about what this comment meant especially after moving his family to a predominantly White neighborhood to lessen his work commute and provide a great education for me and my sister. The hopes and dreams my father had for me and my sister never dissipated as a result of these types of incidents. In fact, it strengthened his push for us to reach our highest potential, knowing that our accomplishments and intelligence could never be taken away, even in the midst of someone believing we are not worthy of any part of the American dream.

At the age of 39, I recall this incident as if it happened yesterday and think about

the scars it left. I had to work through the feelings of rejection and anger even when I got to the high school and college level because I always felt that my White teachers would hold this same perspective about me. As an adult, I worked under the direction of a principal who did not see the children she taught as equals and when I walked into my school every day, I was vehemently dedicated to teaching children to read and form language. This became my life's purpose and compelled me to want to reach higher. The kids I worked with needed a fighting chance to end up in the seat I sit in and not be a byproduct of their environment. During my spare time, I taught a little girl how to read. The principal expressed her concern about meeting with this student after school hours, but I was appalled that it did not make her question why students were leaving their classrooms without the requisite skills moving them to the next grade; learning to read was their civil right. We are no longer beaten for doing so. As a result of my work, this student began her next school year reading on grade level and above grade level by the end of the year. The principal asked me to "work this miracle" with other students who were in jeopardy of being left back a grade. Oh the irony!

The eight principals in this study showed how their students were their reflections, creating culturally appropriate school environments for students of color. While not all principals may feel as if their students are their reflections, the principals in this study used their students to push towards the provision of an academic education and one that prepared them for racial adversity. Each participant exuded brilliance, perseverance, commitment and a keen awareness, which helped meet their students socioemotional and academic needs.

African American principals are outnumbered by their White counterparts in both traditional public and charter school settings. As I began my research, I found there was a dearth of literature about African American charter school leadership. Coupled with the fact that charter schools serve predominantly Black and Latino students, it was important to describe the cultural competence identities of principals who lead these schools and delve into issues surrounding cultural competence. They were able to identify professional development sessions in their schools focusing on cultural competence and communicate to their staff, the relevance of such a topic. Joining together as a staff led to empowerment of teachers and afforded the opportunity to make decisions about teachers who may have struggled in this area. The African American charter school principals also shattered oppression that occurred within their schools. The experiences that led to the development of a Black identity shaped their perspectives as principals. Facing racism from their educators served as an impetus for ensuring their students cultivate positive racial identity.

As they divulged their experiences with fervor, candor, and conviction, I visually recalled the participant's body language and expressions. While reviewing the transcribed interviews, I reflected on the conversations I had with participants and commiserated with familiar experiences. For example, when Woke Wilma shared her experience of being accused of aggression, despite a White woman saying the same thing, we looked at each other with an expression of deep understanding. I recalled exclaiming, "I need a tambourine!" Her story was reminiscent of similar personal experiences. It was like hearing a sermon from the pastor and God's word is right on

time. Every conversation went smoothly and exceeded my expectations. I thought about doing this kind of work on a full-time basis. These principals across the country are doing extraordinary things, devoted to students of color in a climate that tests the African American spirit, psyche, and moral character.

I found their stories quite poignant, moving and transcendental. Their upbringing and views about education illustrated how they led their professional lives and led in their schools. The participants had a common goal of providing a quality, culturally responsive education to students of color. In order to meet this goal, they all exercised careful hiring practices to ensure the students interacted with a diverse staff who accepted and encouraged their natural genius. In order to increase diversity amongst his staff, Confident Constantine, for example, started participating in the screening phone calls for new teachers. Their personal and professional life stories affirmed their profound commitment to their student's education and future. The African American charter school principals were all confident in their own right, each of them able to stand firm in their values and beliefs throughout their tenure as principal. They all recounted their lived experiences, which subsequently birthed natural born leaders bound to the lives of students of color. Each principal commanded a staff to understand and exercise cultural competence within their schools, which also in turn impacted the students and families. Their memories defined their cultural competence identities, shaped the topics and way they led professional development sessions, and shattered oppressive interactions that impacted their students of color.

Although each African American charter school principal had various

backgrounds and experiences, they were inextricably connected. It was of no surprise that each of them endured events or incidents in which they were reminded of being part of an oppressed group. As a whole, the African American charter school principals served as a personal inspiration based on their sheer determination as educational leaders. During the year of my educational leadership internship, I volunteered my time during fourth grade lunch duty. Instead of walking around the room monitoring the students eating lunch, I created games to teach them about different subjects including, but not limited to identifying the 50 states and ELA/math problems related to state tests. Some of my students had never left the Bronx in New York, let alone the existence of other boroughs of the New York City. After reading the transcripts, it became evident that their experiences mirrored those of my own. I too persevered and developed a tenacity as well as the audacity to push students of color towards reaching their goals as confident, educated, humanity bearers. As Cuba Cruise stated:

> I let our students know that there's genius in their genes. They are the mothers and fathers of all humanity and that they have a responsibility to their community and to the world to make it a better place.

Each of these eight African American charter school principals conveyed their quest in cultivating their cultural competence identities and the impact on teacher faculty development. Their quests not only attested and reaffirmed my unwavering decision to pursue a career as an educator, but also the strong desire to ensure all students of color receive a quality education.

When I practiced as a speech-language pathologist, I realized the negative consequences of poor leadership and lack of cultural competence. I initially wanted to become a principal, but felt that the impact I wanted to make was larger than just in one school. I wanted to ensure all school leaders and teaching staff were culturally competent to meet the needs of students of color. The link between the student academic performance and cultural competence is an area that I believe is understudied and overlooked. I used the lessons learned, interactions, and observations as a former speech-language pathologist and aspiring school leader to dedicate my career redressing educational inequalities. These experiences gave me a heightened obligation to influence communities and schools where students are marginalized. The participants in this study revealed through their conversations that their service was not in pursuit of accolades. They commanded the best from their teachers, always aligning practices with the vision and mission of the school in the interest of Black and Brown children.

Lastly, I was left particularly inspired by Confident Constantine's notion of pride in ourselves as Black human beings. His undergraduate experience at Hampton University continued to shape him as a Black man and leader:

> It makes you feel proud to be black and proud to be you. So you walk out into the world just with this confidence that who you are is not only enough, but who you are is exceptional. Where like you are a talented person, but you also have a responsibility as well. It is not good enough just to think about self and try to just only enhance your life or your family's life. But like you have to commit to some form of service because we are where we are because other people died and gave

so much for us, and you have to do your part to continue that.

Attending Howard University also reiterated these same personal sentiments. During my doctoral studies, I chose to concentrate on African American charter school principals in urban schools. My role as an African American educational leader was reinforced by the participant's keen awareness and leadership. I completed this study with a renewed sense of vigor and clear path as to how I was going to make a difference in the lives of Black and Brown children and effect large scale educational change. I am merely the vessel and vehicle the Lord placed me in to meet the needs of all students of color; His purpose compels me to enrich and cultivate culturally responsive educational settings. We will certainly be a force to be reckoned with if all Black and Brown children receive a stellar education.

Summary

In chapter 1, I began with a synopsis of the purpose and the processes involved in the study to understand the scope of this investigation. I ventured to examine and interpret the cultural competence identities of eight African American charter school principals. Guided by research questions, this study investigated the cultural competence identities of African American charter school principals and the impact of those identities on teacher faculty development, specifically professional development and was guided by research questions.

In chapter 2, I reviewed literature in order to conceptualize my study. Topics reviewed included: the history of charter schools, benefits and challenges of charter

schools, leadership, leadership in traditional public schools, leadership in charter schools, African American leadership in charter schools, social justice leadership, theory of Nigrescence, challenges with the theory of Nigrescence, transformative learning theory, cultural competence, teacher professional development, culturally responsive pedagogy, African American culture, culturally influenced learning styles, faculty development in African American independent schools, teacher efficacy, and hegemonic behaviors.

In chapter 3, I described the methodological framework used in my study, which included data collection methods, and the process of data analysis. Given the varied responses of the participants, a qualitative study was used to allow for constructed meanings to be interpreted In Chapter IV, I presented the findings of the research and analysis of the findings. Chapter V included links to literature, recommendations, implications for further research, and conclusions.

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